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July  
2006

# ANIMATION<sup>TM</sup>

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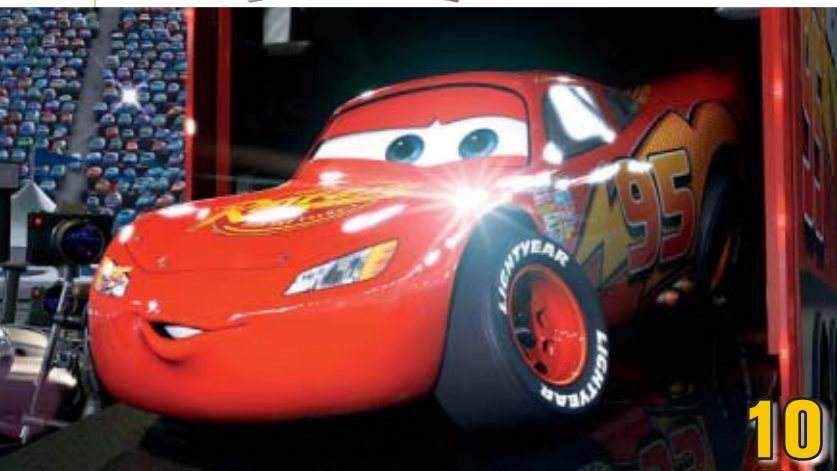
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# ANIMATION MAGAZINE

Volume 20, Issue 7, Number 162, July 2006

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## On the Cover:

©Disney/Pixar test-drives its state-of-the-art 2006 model, *Cars*. Licensing: Moonscoop comes to the Licensing Show with a variety of hot animated tie-ins.

Annecy: Aniboom Awards is now accepting toon entries from around the world ([www.aniboom.com](http://www.aniboom.com)).

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If you had any doubts about the unprecedented boom in animation, all you had to do was look closely at the list of the features unspooling at the Cannes Film Festival this year. Not only was this year's lineup impressive in the sheer number of animated projects on display, it was an interesting indicator of the diversity of projects being produced internationally.

Sure, *The Da Vinci Code* premiere and Tom Hanks' hair might have grabbed most of the headlines at the world's largest film festival, but there were several animated projects which raised a few eyebrows in the mix. In addition to DreamWorks' *Over the Hedge* (last month's cover critters) and Richard Linklater's rotoscope-animated *A Scanner Darkly* (which you can read about in next month's issue of this magazine), the festival featured a special retrospective screening of 13 films by famed experimental guru Norman McLaren, who founded the influential animation department at the National Film Board of Canada.

Cannes was also the premiere stage for *Azur and Asmar*, the latest artistic effort by Michel Ocelot, the French auteur behind the two brilliant *Kirikou* movies. The lush, traditionally animated feature uses African and Oriental-style art to tell the story of the friendship between a Muslim and a Christian boy and how it's threatened by cultural and socio-economic differences in the ancient world.

We should also keep an eye on *Princess*, the highly controversial 2D animated movie from Danish wunderkind Anders Morgenthaler (*The Nelly Nut Show*, *Araki*). Much has already been written about this extremely adult offering, which kicked off Cannes Director's Fortnight Series. Morgenthaler's pic addresses some hot-button issues while



*Azur and Asmar*

telling the story of a priest who is bent on destroying all the pornographic material related to his dead sister. The revenge tragedy is seen as a powerful statement against the negative impact of the porn industry on society.

While we're looking at the global picture, let's hear it for those good eggs from Mexico, which have fried up the competition in their home country. Rodolfo and Gabriel Riva Palacio's *The Egg Film* (*Una Pelicula de Huevos*) has become the second highest grossing Mexican film ever (the top title is still the live-action *El crimen del Padre*

*Amaro*). Hatched by Rodolfo and Gabriel's brilliant animated Internet venture, the feature has raked in over \$15 million for distributor Videocine. Not bad for a quirky toon about a hilarious bunch of drunken eggs.



*The Egg Film*

*Ramin*

Ramin Zahed  
Editor-in-Chief  
[rzahed@animationmagazine.net](mailto:rzahed@animationmagazine.net)

## Quote of the Month

"There is no reason to make something that looks like a cheap version of a Disney film. F\*\* it, let's do something that will open their eyes. Wide. This movie ... It's not nice. It's tough and incredibly depressing. I'm enormously proud of it already."

—Anders Morgenthaler, director of *Princess*, a Danish animated movie about a priest who decides to destroy all pornographic material featuring his dead sister. The film screened at the Cannes Film Festival last month.



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## The Animation Planner

# July

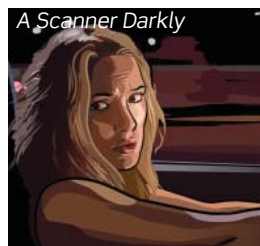
### FRAME-BY-FRAME

**3-13** Hit two birds with one stone by visiting Paris and taking in some cool animation courses at Gobelins during the **French and Euro Creation in Film Animation Summer School** in Paris ([www.gobelins.fr/summerschool](http://www.gobelins.fr/summerschool)).

**11** Time to hit the DVD stores to pick up the new **Avatar: Book 1 Vol. 4** release.



**7** Arrrrrr! Time to get thee to theaters to catch Gore Verbinski's CG-packed sequel, **Pirates of the Caribbean: Dead Man's Chest**. Also on the hot movie list this weekend is Richard



Linklater's cool roto-animated feature, **A Scanner Darkly**, with the voices of Keanu Reeves and Winona Ryder. Trinity University in San Antonio, Texas, hosts the **18th Annual Society for Animation Studies Conference** (<http://crossroads.animationstudies.org>).

*Pirates of the Caribbean*



**7-9** Get an early preview of all the cool summer vfx-laden blockbusters at the **VES Festival of Visual Effects** in Hollywood, Calif. ([www.visualeffectssociety.com](http://www.visualeffectssociety.com)).

**13-14** Brush up on your handheld tech knowledge at the **4th Annual Mobile Game Conference** in Seattle, Wash. ([www.mobilegameconference.com](http://www.mobilegameconference.com)).

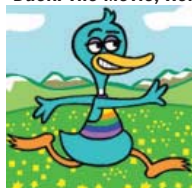
*Pulse*



**14** You may get some buzz out of the scary movie, **Pulse**, starring Kristen Bell and Rick Gonzalez, which is about otherworldly, evil electronic vibes.

**14-30** Not like you need an excuse, but you may want to jet down to beautiful Brazil for the **Anima Mundi Festival** in Rio and São Paulo ([www.animamundi.com/br](http://www.animamundi.com/br)).

**18** Decisions, decisions ... you'll have to pick between **A Pup Named Scooby-Doo Vol. 3** and **4**, **Best of She-Ra: Princess of Power**, **Queer Duck: The Movie**, **Ren & Stimpy: The Lost Episodes** and **SpongeBob SquarePants: Karate Island** at DVD stores today.



**20-23** If you like cool designs and aesthetic pleasures, you should plan your visit to the **Adobe Design Achievement Awards** in Toronto ([www.adobe.com/education](http://www.adobe.com/education)). Meanwhile, comic book and fantasy lovers will fight the geek-friendly crowds at the annual **Comic-Con** phenom in San Diego, Calif. ([www.comic-con.org](http://www.comic-con.org)).



**21** Director M. Night Shyamalan is up to his old tricks again with the new supernaturally themed feature, **Lady in the Water**, starring Opie's daughter, Bryce Dallas Howard, and everyone's favorite wine snob, Paul Giamatti. More CG-animated fun comes our way via Sony's **Monster House**, directed by Gil Kenan.

**22-24** Toon fans will take a bite out of the Big Apple in Brooklyn this week at the cool and festive **Animation Block Party** ([www.animationblock.com](http://www.animationblock.com)).



**25** Finally, you can get your hands on **Animaniacs: Vol. 1** and **Pinky and the Brain: Vol. 1** on DVD today. Also out for your home viewing pleasure are **Galaxy High School Vol. 2** and **The Jimmy Timmy Power Hour 3**.



**28** **Jimmy Neutron** creator Steve Oedekerk brings some fun-loving farm animals to CG-animated life in the udderly charming **Barnyard**, featuring the voices of Kevin James, Sam Elliot and Danny Glover.



**30** Maybe you can also catch a Red Sox game at Fenway Park when you attend this year's cool CG animation confab, **SIGGRAPH 2006** in Boston, Mass. ([www.siggraph.org/s2006](http://www.siggraph.org/s2006)).

To get your company's events and products listed in this monthly calendar, please e-mail [sgurman@animationmagazine.net](mailto:sgurman@animationmagazine.net)



## Tom Goes to the Mayor Again

If satiric jabs at small-town politics put a smile on your face, then you're probably celebrating the new season of **Tom Goes to the Mayor**, which airs Sundays at 12:30 a.m. on Cartoon Network's [adult swim]. The comedy series from exec producer **Bob Odenkirk** (*Mr. Show with Bob & David*) employs very limited animation to illustrate the misadventures of would-be entrepreneur Tom Peters who is constantly bringing his crackpot ideas to the mayor of the eccentric small town of Jefferton. The show is written and

produced by Tim Heidecker and Eric Wareheim, who also voice the two main characters. Odenkirk and *Mr. Show* co-star David Cross provide other voices as will Tenacious D duo Jack Black (*School of Rock*) and Kyle Gass.

Among the hot-shot voice guests lined up for Season Two are Dave Foley, Gary Busey, Judd Hirsch, Sean Hayes, Janeane Garofalo, Bob

Balaban, Garry Shandling, Robert Loggia, Michael Ian Black, Fred Armisen and rapper Sir Mix-a-Lot. The success of the toon should warm the hearts of indie animators everywhere since it's based on a short film that college pals Heidecker and Wareheim created and sent to all their comedy heroes, including Odenkirk. All it took was a pitch meeting with the big cheeses at [adult swim] and another crazy late-night show earned its moth-eaten wings. ■



## The Future's in the Stars



If you've been to animation events around the world in the past few years, you might have

already met French producer **Sylvie Martin** and her Paris-based shingle, **Strapontin**. Last year, Martin got a lot of attention for producing Jeremy Clapin's award-winning short *Backbone Tale* (*Une Histoire Vertébrale*). Martin is now working on a very cool (26 x 24) animated series, in conjunction with French broadcaster TF1. She's taking the latest 3D animation tests for the project, which is called **Sinbad of the Stars** to the Annecy festival and market, and from the looks of it, it has all the makings of an out-of-this-world blast.

"The fantastic universe of the series, which resembles a futuristic Middle East is populated with robots, space-ships, strange creatures, and that makes it ideal for an adventure show," says Martin. "The project's central characters are a spaceship commander and a princess ... they are two real heroes, something that we do not see enough of on TV! I think everyone who gets the chance to read the scripts also acknowledges the high quality of the scripts. The show's Saroua spaceship is designed by Philippe Ogaki who has worked on many Luc Besson projects."

*Sinbad of the Stars*, which will ready for delivery by the end of 2007, currently has three completed scripts, ten treatments and graphic bible and a storyboard. "We are working to complete the financing," adds

Martin. "We received interest from various partners and should be able to announce a deal with an Italian TV and co-producer very soon. A big German TV entity and an American studio have also expressed interest."

Martin notes that the animation combines CG animation with 2D backgrounds and cel-shading. The series will be made for High Def TV 16/9.

When asked about the specific challenges of her latest pet project, Martin is typically French and philosophical. "Like many animation projects, the big challenge is to find the momentum with which all interested parties are supporting the series so that it will result in full development and a good end." Bon chance, Sylvie! ■



## Nelvana's Babar Stumps for Ecology

**B**abar, the famous elephant star of children's books and animated TV, is set to educate French children about the environment. Nelvana, which handles consumer products based on the property, has signed a deal with the Ministry of Ecology and Durable Development in France to help spread the word about the importance of ecology by using a character beloved by kids around the world.

Each year during the summer holidays, the Ministry issues a guide that informs school children of ways they can help preserve the environment. Babar, who celebrates his 75th anniversary this year, will be the mascot for the 2006 guide, entitled *Babar Le P'tit Ecolo*. Illustrated in watercolor, Babar and his family show children how each individual can impact the environment every day by doing simple things like turning off lights, conserving water, composting and properly disposing of garbage. 500,000 copies of the guide featuring Babar will be printed in vegetable ink on recycled paper and distributed via tollbooths on the Paris-Rhine-Rhone motorways and through French broadcaster Tiji's summer events. To date, more than 10 million Babar books have been sold in France alone. Other Babar anniversary activities will include the June launch of a Babar-branded postage stamp and meet-and-greet school appearances.



# Activision Takes Hedge to the Edge

Edge of Reality creates its own animated magic with the *Over the Hedge* game. **by Ryan Ball**

In DreamWorks Animation's latest computer-generated animal adventure/comedy, some forest pals must overcome their fear of the unknown to discover all the edible treasures that await them in the foreign labyrinth known as suburbia. Activision's *Over the Hedge* game challenges young players to take another look at familiar surroundings as homes and backyards much like their own become harrowing obstacle courses ripe with dangers and laughs.

Bringing the action to interactive life for consoles was the task of lead animator Chad Hranckak and the rest of the talented development team at Edge of Reality. As Activision sets up shop on the DreamWorks campus to facilitate collaboration, we thought we'd have Hranckak point out

some of the major differences between animating for movies and creating performances for games.

"With movies, you can have a lot of the character come out in dialogue, interaction with different things and story events. But in a game, you have to get all the character you can out of simple actions like a walk or a run." Hranckak notes. "For instance, Verne shooting a gun doesn't really fit his character, so we had him kind of covering his eyes up and getting all shy about it."

One character who steals the movie is Hammy, the squirrel voiced by Steve Carell. The animators at DreamWorks obviously didn't consider the limitations of game engines when they had him zipping around at the speed of sound. Hranckak



remarks, "It was really hard because he's a super-speedy character but he had to run at the same

speed as all the other characters. We had to take away his full stride and do a little bit of the Road Runner foot sliding to make him look a little more frantic and feel like he's really moving."

According to Hranckak, perhaps the biggest difference between film and game animation is that with games you have to consider the character from every possible angle. "In film, you're always animating to a camera, which is really nice. It takes out that whole third plane and requires half the work. When I first got into games, I had no idea it would be so much work to get one animation in." Hranckak got to animate for a camera a lot with his last project, heading up animation on all the cinematics for Activision's *Shark Tale* game. ■

**DreamWorks' *Over the Hedge* is currently in theaters and the game is available for PlayStation2, Xbox, Game Cube, PC and Nintendo DS.**

GAMES

## The E3 Hit List

The Electronic Entertainment Expo, the video game industry's biggest annual event, was held in May at the Los Angeles Convention Center. And though special guest Paris Hilton couldn't be bothered to know the title of the game that Gameloft developed around her persona (*Paris Hilton's Jewellery Case*), we'll steal her famous catch-phrase for this piece and point out a few of the attractions that deserve a "That's Hot!"

### Nintendo's Wii



The curious waited in line for the better part of eternity to get a glimpse of the GameCube successor. What sets this next-generation console apart from the others is its revolutionary new game controller.

The wireless device looks and works much like a remote control, and has been designed to provide a much more intuitive gaming experience. With a tennis game, for instance, the controller becomes a virtual racket that the player actually swings. The hit is felt through a vibration in the unit, and a built-in speaker even transmits the sound. The remote can also become a sword or turned sideways and gripped with both hands like a steering wheel. Kudos to Nintendo

for thinking outside the button pad.

### John Woo Presents Stranglehold

This shoot-'em-up from Midway Games has actor Chow Yun-Fat reprising the role of police inspector Tequila from Woo's 1992 film, *Hard Boiled*. Woo changed the face of action films by staging gunfights as if they were ballet performances, and does the same for games with this next-gen offering for PlayStation3, Xbox 360 and PC. Arriving at retail this winter, the game has Chow sliding down banisters, diving onto rolling carts, swing from chandeliers and dogging



rocket launchers. Easily one of the coolest presentations at the show.

### Metal Gear Solid: Digital Graphic Novel

Props to Konami for bringing something new to the PSP. From Kojima Prods., this is the first interactive digital graphic Novel for Sony's hand-held platform. Comic fans will enjoy peeling this onion of intrigue and action as they uncover hidden information and unravel the twisted tale of the "Shadow Moses Incident." Based on the hugely successful game franchise, the story comes to life with limited animation and gorgeous artwork by award-winning illustrator Ashley Wood.



### Indiana Jones

Since E3 is all about innovation, we would be remiss to not mention LucasArts's 2007 *Indiana Jones* release for Xbox 360 and PlayStation3. Steven Spielberg himself was on hand at E3 as the company offered initial glimpses of this first video game to incorporate NaturalMotion's Euphoria procedural engine. Say goodbye to canned animations and welcome a new era where gameplay moments are unique and never happen the same way twice. For more detailed information on this technology, go to [www.naturalmotion.com](http://www.naturalmotion.com). ■







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### Jataka

#### Jataka katha :

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Darla K. Anderson

John Lasseter

Photo credit: Deborah Coleman

## FEATURE

## ALL REVVED UP!

Our reporter gets inside the hood of *Cars*, the big shiny summer release from John Lasseter and his team of CG mechanics and magicians at Pixar. **by Charles Solomon**

**E**ver since *Luxo, Jr.* debuted in 1986, John Lasseter and the Pixar Studio have had an enviable reputation as outstanding storytellers who excel at bringing inanimate objects to life. But making automobiles into credible characters proved more challenging than desk lamps or toys, as the artists discovered when they went to work on *Cars*.

"*Cars* is the most complex film we've ever done," says producer Darla K. An-

derson. "John wanted to have ray tracing in it to get realistic reflections. Everyone knows what the reflections on cars look like, and he felt if they didn't look right, people would be pulled out of the story. John always jokes that we work really hard to do something that looks so good, it disappears into the background."

Even with a network of 3,000 computers, and processors that run four times faster than they did on

*The Incredibles*, the average render time for a single frame of *Cars* was 17 hours. But the technical hurdles were minor compared to the challenge of creating cars that audiences would accept as living characters, but still move like real automobiles.

*Cars* tells the story of Lightning McQueen (voiced by Owen Wilson), a hot-shot racing car who's eager to win his first Piston





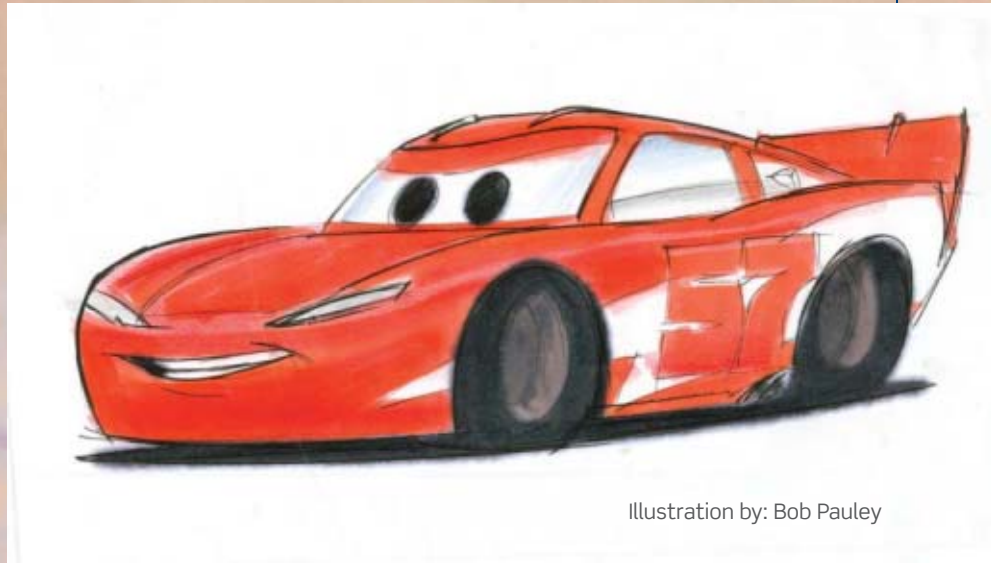


Illustration by: Bob Pauley

Cup championship. When he's marooned in a flyspeck town on Route 66, the quirky vehicles who've remained there force McQueen to re-examine his life and values. The character's emotional transformation required subtle acting, but a traditional approach to the animation proved unsatisfactory: the cars didn't look solid enough.

"We developed what we called a 'driving system'



for a lot of the physics of the car: how it moves during turns and braking, how the body rocks over the springs," explains writer/director John Lasseter. "We could adjust it to make the shocks softer or the springs bouncier or weight heavier—down to the pressure in the tires. We could tune the numbers so it felt like a really tight performance car or an old, soft '50s B."

"Some of the early tests had a lot of squash and stretch, which is very charming in hand-drawn animation where you have the flat colors. But when we rendered the chrome and all, the cars didn't look like 3,000-pound automobiles," Lasseter continues. "We started looking at ways to achieve squash and stretch without the audience noticing the metal parts bending. So we'd strike a pose, then move quickly into the next pose.

If we adjusted the car during that movement, you wouldn't see it bend. Once it hit the next pose, we'd keep it stiff. That way, we were able to get the attitudes and poses without the audience getting the sensation the car was made of rubber."

Another part of the solution lay in a quality rarely seen in contemporary animated features: underplaying. Lasseter says, "Paul Newman provides the voice for a 1951 Hudson Hornet—a legendary car. But the Hornet has a tremendous chrome grill, and when we moved it in big mouth shapes, it looked like crumpling rubber. The answer lay in Paul's performance: it's very subtle, and his mouth doesn't move that much. Jim Murphy, our directing animator did some tests, where he moved the mouth very subtly, and the character just came alive."

FEATURE





*Cars* has been a long journey for Lasseter. He and his co-director, the late Joe Ranft, began work on the film after finishing *A Bug's Life* in 1998. In

the intervening eight years,

the animation industry has undergone major changes; the \$7.4 billion acquisition of Pixar by the Walt Disney Company probably ranks as the most significant of those changes. Speculation has been rampant about how the Pixar team will change Disney Feature Animation—and vice versa. Anderson offers a reassuring message.

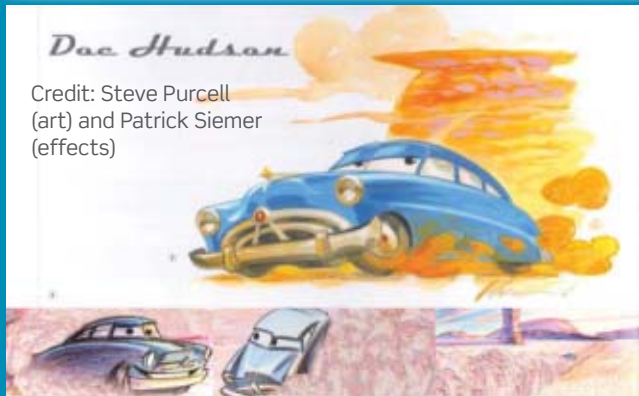
"As John and Ed (Catmull) are in control, I don't see it changing too much," she concludes. "They have a great recipe for success, which is being true to the vision of the artist and supporting it. I don't see that changing. In meetings, certain things will come up and John and Ed will say, 'No we're keeping Pixar Pixar.' The company is always changing, but I don't see it changing in a bad way." ■

**Charles Solomon is a Los Angeles-based journalist and animation expert. He is the author of *The Disney That Never Was* and *Enchanted Drawings: The History of Animation*.**

**Disney/Pixar's *Cars* zooms into theaters nationwide on June 9.**

*Doc Hudson*

Credit: Steve Purcell  
(art) and Patrick Siemer  
(effects)



## SETTING THE WHEELS IN MOTION

In *The Art of Cars*, the new book by Michael Wallis and Suzanne Fitzgerald Wallis, John Lasseter is quoted as saying, "I told my wife I had to go to the races for the good of Pixar. Even though we were creating an animated film, I wanted it to be authentic in every single detail...we had to do our homework."

The film's seasoned supervising animation directors Doug Sweetland and Scott Clark also did a lot of research to get the details of the four-wheel world exactly right. "We drove around race tracks and took notes on everything, from how the crew changed the tires and tanks of gas to the way forklifts were used," says Clark. The Pixar gang went to the racetracks in Las Vegas, Sonoma, Bristol and Lowe's Motor Speedway in Charlotte, N. Carolina to get first-hand knowledge of the sights and sounds of the fast lane.

Sweetland says the team also studied the general demeanor of competitive wunderkinds like Michael Jordan, Tiger Woods and the young Muhammad Ali to flesh out the character of the hotshot car, Lightning McQueen (voiced by Owen Wilson). They also watched every possible cool car chase scene captured in live-action movies—from *It's a Mad, Mad, Mad, Mad World* and *Smokey and the Bandit* to *The French Connection* and *Ronin*.

The directors emphasize the fact that at Pixar, creative storytelling possibilities drive the technological innovations, not vice versa. "As soon as you decide to tell a story about fish, then you tackle creating realistic water in CG, not the other way around," explains Sweetland. "For me, what is amazing is that *Cars* comes right after *The Incredibles* because conceptually they are so different from each other. The animation is handled with such a staggering flexibility—two completely opposite worlds are involved."

Obviously, animating cars, which have no arms, legs, fins or eyes in real life, was one of the biggest challenges of the movie. "The big question was how do you get all the emotions, dramas, pathos and comedy with less," notes Clark. "It was the first movie in which we didn't have anything to anthropomorphize. We had to show more with less. It was all about being economical and elegant and making simple acting choices. You do a lot of research on the physical restraints of the real world, and then you have all the cartoony stuff that the animators love to push, and you just walk that line."

Unlike the cars featured in Aardman Animation's popular Chevron commercials, which have their eyes on the headlights, the Pixar autos have their eyes positioned in their windshields. "If you look at the cars as human characters, you don't want to be able to see through the windshields—inside their heads!" reasons Clark.

Both directors have nothing but strong praise for Lasseter and his inspiring leadership. "He's smart enough to know that great art in animation can only be possible as a team and collaboratively," says Clark. "He surrounds himself with great artists and tech people, and he picks the best ideas. The love goes around all the way through the crew and back. He was running the studio and directing the movie at the same time, and we were the big brothers babysitting the team." Adds Sweetland, "it's true: His enthusiasm and love for animation is really contagious."

When asked to offer hints about Pixar's next big picture, *Ratatouille*, Sweetland says it all with a wonderful economy of words. "We have pet rats, and we're watching them constantly."

—Ramin Zahed



Doug Sweetland



Scott Clark



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Annecy 2006 Rabbit  
Logo: Felix Creation,  
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# A Week of Wonders

The 30th edition of the Annecy Festival (June 5-10) offers a remarkable cross-section of animated works from around the world. **by Ramin Zahed**



It may be an industry-wide cliché to refer to the annual Annecy animation festival as the ideal spot to view the best of indie animation. But as Oscar-nominated animator and frequent festival participant Bill Plympton points out, "French audiences are very knowledgeable and fervent about their animation. If they don't like your film, they'll throw paper and crap at the screen and maybe even at you. But if they like your film, you'll become an instant superstar!"

This year, the event organizers received 1,732 films from 62 countries and the selection committee ended up with 260 entries with 213 in competition.

As always, there are many chances to catch delightful shorts (Bruce Alcock's *At the Quinte Hotel*, Heebok Lee's *Tread Softly*, Steve Smith's *Leap of Faith*, Joanna Quinn's *Dreams and Desires: Family Ties* and Daniel Sousa's *Fable*, to name a few) and five features (*Asterix and the Vikings* and *Renaissance* from France, Japan's xxxHOLiC *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *Origin—Spirits of the Past* and DreamWorks/Aardman's *Wallace and Gromit: The Curse of the Were-Rabbit*). The jury has also selected 25 contenders in the TV series category—from *Bernard and Catscratch* to *Creature Comforts*, *Planet Sketch*, *Pingu*, *Pocoyo* and *Skyland*.

And those are just the official competition entries. Fest organizers are also planning a tribute to Italian masters such as Bozzetto, Luzzati, d'Alo, Cavandoli and Toccafondo, a special sidebar on "when animation meets the living," featuring works by Norman McLaren, Raoul Servais, Zbigniew Rybczynski and Chris Landreth, a program of "very short shorts" on AIDS and a salute to award-winning shorts from Folimage. Also, you won't want to miss beautiful exhibits devoted to the work of Yoshitaka Amano and everyone's favorite elephant king, Babar.

The festival's artistic director Serge Bromberg tells us the CG animation and technology have both helped and hindered the selection. "We saw more quality in the 'quality films,' but we also have less hope that new technologies

will help unskilled directors make good films," he explains. "It seems that beginners are either not able to handle the tools of animation or too fascinated by them to think that the final results must be of interest. The good animated film is not the one that moves the images, but the one that moves the audience!"

Bromberg says he's excited about a program in the festival which explores the marriage between live action and animation. "It's one of the most subtle and unexpected programs I've seen in many years," he notes. "This year, the big surprise was the numerous entries India had for pre-selection. We also saw more feature films, more technology and CGI, more politically correct films and a lot of work by newcomers."

As far as the big picture and Annecy's mission are concerned, Bromberg explains, "Our most important goal is to show that animation is Cinema with a capital 'C'—more diverse, more elaborate than the general audience believes. At Annecy, all the auteurs are equal—short, feature, independent, low-budget and big major productions. It's not a question of putting one against the others because, in the end, the magic comes from the pleasure of discovering animated films we've never seen before."

Of course, one can't forget the incidental pleasures of the event. As our friend, Bill Plympton (whose latest short *Guide Dog*, the sequel to his Oscar-nominated short *Guard Dog*, plays in the festival's panorama program) reminds us, "First, Annecy is this perfect little village nestled in the French Alps between a beautiful mountainside and the lovely Lac d'Annecy with a crystal clear canal winding through the city, populated with Disney-like swans. Second, the regional food is considered by some to be the best in France, and since it is so close to Italy, you get the best of both cuisines. Third, you may find yourself eating your marvelous dinner sitting next to Jan Svankmajer or John Lasseter, Roy Disney or Nick Park, or if your really lucky, Bill Plympton!" ■

**For more info about this annual event, visit [www.annecy.org](http://www.annecy.org).**



Serge Bromberg



Bill Plympton

Bill Plympton's *Guide Dog* screens at Annecy.



© 2006 Bill Plympton

FEATURE





# Chilly Scenes of Summer

Two Japanese features with impressive pedigrees tell haunting tales at Annecy. **by Patrick Drazen**

The odds are always tough at the Annecy International Animated Film Festival; only one in six films that apply gets screened. In 2006, the fest offers 260 films, out of over 1,700 applicants. Two of this year's offerings are major examples of Japanese animation.

One of the two anime offerings runs an hour, which counts as a feature in Japan. Given its pedigree, it would have been hard to deny xxxHOLiC A Midsummer Night's Dream. Based on a comic by the highly popular women's cartoon collective known as CLAMP, the film was animated by Production I.G., the cutting-edge animation studio responsible for the classic *Ghost in the Shell* (the two movies and the two TV series), the film *Blood: The Last Vampire* (as well as its new TV spinoff, *Blood+*) and a film based on another recent CLAMP project, *Tsubasa Chronicle*.

The weekly manga xxxHOLiC (the name roughly means, "addicted to...") premiered in *Young Magazine* in 2003 and presented the gothic side of CLAMP. The hero, Kimihiro Watanuki, troubled by ghosts and spirits, sought out the witch Yuuko Ichihara. He now works for Yuuko in her old curiosity shop as the price for her help. xxxHOLiC A Midsummer Night's Dream opened in Japan in August of 2005 on a double-bill with the *Tsubasa Chronicle* film—and characters from both appear in each other's movies. (xxxHOLiC and *Tsubasa Chronicle* have also both spun off anime TV series.)

Summer is usually the favored time in Japan to tell ghost stories, since it's believed the summer heat and humidity can best be fought off by a good case of the chills. There are certainly chills in this supernatural mystery, as Yuuko, who promises to "make any wish come true" for the right price, attends a mysterious auction where the items up for bid never appear but the other seven bidders start disappearing one by one. It all

may have something to do with Yuuko's latest customer, a young woman whose house has apparently locked her out.

Director Tsutomu Mizushima began his career working on the very different *Crayon Shin-chan* movies and TV series. The switch from bizarre comedy to gothic chills, however, wasn't a jarring one. "Personally, I think 'laughs' and 'scariness' have very much in common," he said in an interview. "They do not appeal to reason, but they overwhelm our minds directly. I can't explain it well, but I always felt that they had the same feel. Of course, it could be only me who thinks this way." (laughs)

The crossover factor between the two CLAMP projects was deliberate but also hard to pull off, according to Junichi Fujisaki, who co-wrote both films. "We really wracked our brains trying to figure out how to connect the two films. We made sure each film stood on its own, but the two stories are still inter-related."

The other anime at Annecy is the first feature film produced by GONZO, the Japanese studio that proved that computer-generated animation could have all of the warmth and

Origin - Spirits of the Past

© Goh-genzo animation holding co.,ca



emotional impact (and even some of the look) of 2D cel animation. GONZO made a splash on the anime scene in 1999 with *Blue Submarine Number 6* and built its reputation from there with television series like *Last Exile*, *Gankutsuou: The Count of Monte Cristo*, and their recent hit *Witchblade*.

For its first feature, GONZO turned to the kind of post-Apocalyptic sci fi that has become an anime staple. *Gin-iro no kami no Agito* (*Silver-Haired Agito*), English-language version is called *Origin - Spirits of the Past*, based on a script by Naoko Kakimoto and Nana Shiina, takes place 300 years after humans have been displaced as masters of Earth by an alien race of sentient plants. The two young heroes, Agito and Cain, discover a machine that holds a girl who's been in hibernation for three centuries. Her awakening could once again change the destiny of the planet!

Director Keiichi Sugiyama moved to GONZO after working on video games and directing and doing storyboards for several episodes of the landmark anime series *Neon Genesis Evangelion*. Character design was by Kouji Ogata, best known for creating the look of the *Boogiepop Phantom* and *Scryed* series.

Annecy is actually just one stop in a global tour for *Agito*. Shochiku, the Japanese corporation distributing the film, signed a deal with the China Film Group. In March of this year, two months after the Japanese premiere, a Chinese translation of the film opened on 1,000 Chinese screens. This is the first Japanese anime film distributed in China. Relations between the two countries have long been frosty, given Japan's military adventures a century ago. Perhaps the cautionary tale of *Agito* will help thaw things out. ■

**Patrick Drazen is a Chicago-based writer who specializes in anime. He is the author of *Anime Explosion! The What? Why? & Wow! of Japanese Animation* (Stonebridge Press).**

© 2005 CLAMP/Kodansha/“The Movie xxxHOLiC A Midsummer Night's Dream” Committee



FEATURE



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# The Art of a Black-and-White Renaissance

Director Christian Volckman hopes to change the way the world views adult animation. **by Ramin Zahed**

**A** tough-as-nails cop investigates the mysterious kidnapping of a young girl in Paris and her connection with an anti-aging drug created by a pharmaceutical outfit in the year 2054. Many French filmgoers know that this intriguing plotline doesn't belong to the latest Ridley Scott Film or a familiar Philip K. Dick story. It's the story which drives the recent movie *Renaissance*, which is in competition at Annecy this month, after playing in theaters across France since March 15. It may not be surprising that it was made for 14 million euros or that it was shot in black and white, but what may raise a few eyebrows is that this highly original project is an animation venture reliant on mo-cap technology at Marc Miance's Attitude Studio in Paris.

Director Christian Volckman began work on the feature over six years ago, after receiving much acclaim for his enigmatic short *Maaz*. Upon hatching up the script with Gallic scribes Alexandre de la Patelliere and Mathieu Delaporte, Volckman and his ubiquitous producer Aton Soumache (*Skyland* series) went to Miance who designed the visuals using Vicom cameras' Motion-Capture technologies. "We knew that shooting the film in black and white would transcend the problems of 3D animation," says the 34-year-old director from his home in Paris during a late-Friday-night phone conversation. "What you usually see in 3D is either cartoony or ultra-realistic. But we thought with this noir storyline, we

had the possibility to do something graphic that was unique and interesting."

A fan of Neo-expresssionism and classic cinematic auteurs such as Sergei Eisenstein, Fritz Lang and Orson Welles, Volckman has a fondness for the freedoms afforded by a black-and-white canvas. "You can see what the black-and-white films afforded those artists because it adds a natural poetic way to tell stories. You can hide some imperfections and make the audience's imagination work on the unconscious level."

In addition to Vicom, the animation team relied on Maya software as well as Massive for the crowd scenes to bring to life the director's visions. However, nothing they had worked on before had prepared the team for their new futuristic venture. "You have to think about everything when you're shooting, and it's trickier than you expect," admits Volckman. "When you're making a mo-cap film, you inherit everything that comes for the 2D world, as well as all the headaches of a 3D movie. Plus, you have the usual problems with actors, just like any live-action movie. And because it takes so long to make, you have to rely on things that you came up with five years ago. The storyboards have to be extremely clear. Because if you make mistakes in the first two years, you're stuck with them for the rest of the production. You can fix them a bit or cheat with editing, but sometimes it can be very problematic."

Of course, there is also the familiar prob-

lem of dealing with technology developing at a faster pace than your best efforts or projects that may seem or look a lot like your original vision. When the film began its run in Paris theaters a couple of months back, some saw similarities with the 2005 Robert Rodriguez/Frank Miller sci-fi noir *Sin City*, which has a sequel in the works for next year. Yet, Volckman says those comparisons are superficial at best.

"Our movie was influenced by the original Frank Miller comic books," notes Volckman. "I love the style and how he resolves problems in a black-and-white world. Our first reaction when we found out about *Sin City*, was 'Oh, shit, we're going to die!' But when we saw the movie, we were relieved because that one had big stars playing against green-screen, in a weird graphic world. The technology and the general feeling of that film were very different from ours."

Volckman says he constantly had to answer certain questions during the financing stages of the film. "People would read the script and say, 'It's great ... but why black and white? Why animation? Why futuristic, and why set it in Paris? We were very lucky to





have made the film for 14 million euros [close to \$18 million] considering the fact that an American mo-cap movie like *The Polar Express* costs a lot more [upward of \$150 million, to be exact!]."



Christian Volckman

It also helps when your film has a big fan with deep pockets, such as Disney's exec producer Jake Eberts (*Dances with Wolves*, *James and the Giant Peach*, *Chicken Run*) who pre-bought the French movie on the basis of a script and a four-minute pilot in May of 2003. Reportedly, 70 percent of the film's budget came from foreign pre-sales to some 40 territories and the rest was raised by French producers Canal Plus and France 2.

As Volckman points out, if you were to shoot the film in live action, the cost would have been much higher. "The action takes place in a futuristic version of Paris. Then you have things like a car chase and you have to shoot it in Notre Dame ... in the real world, the budgets would be high ... and you have to be *The Da Vinci Code* to afford that."



Because Volckman spent three of his high school years as an exchange student in Virginia, he developed a strong understanding of how both cultures view each other. "It's interesting to find out the myths and the stereotypes each country has about the other. I was very influenced by *Star Wars* when I was a kid, and I still watch a lot of American shows like *Lost* and *Six Feet Under*."

The headaches of financing aside, Volckman says he is thrilled to be working at a time where there is so much excitement surrounding animation. "Pixar continues to inspire everyone all over the world," he says. "You are truly only limited by the lim-

its of your imagination today. Nevertheless, you don't see a lot of animation made for adults in America. Then you have all the wonderful work that comes out of Japan, from *Ghost in the Shell* and *Akira* to all the beautiful Miyazaki movies. That's why we're happy to do something entirely different. We see animation as a tool to tell good stories. Animation continues to be an area where you can still try new and exciting things." ■

**Miramax will release Volckman's *Renaissance* in the U.S. this September. To watch a clip and find more info, visit [www.renaissance-lefilm.com](http://www.renaissance-lefilm.com).**

**FEATURE**



Roger Allers



## No Fairy-Tale Ending

Hans Christian Andersen's poignant tale of an impoverished girl inspires Roger Allers' *The Little Matchgirl* which premieres at Annecy this year. by Ron Barbagallo

Faithful to Danish author Hans Christian Andersen's emotional hues, Disney's adaptation of *The Little Matchgirl* follows on the heels of the studio's recent Academy Award-nominated shorts *Destino* and *Lorenzo*. It marks the Mouse House's fifth adaptation of Andersen and is directed by Roger Allers, offering a glimpse of what may be coming from Disney's newly expanded shorts program.

"*Matchgirl* got its start in 2002," co-producer Baker Bloodworth recalls. "Roy Disney was intent on creating this *Fantasia* sequel which we were calling *The Music Project*. It was intended to be a compilation of shorts that featured music and was to be representative of different sounds and cultures."

"We were looking for international stories" producer Don Hahn continues "and *Matchgirl* made sense for this. It is something that could be done in pantomime

and to music. Hans Christian Andersen is a well we've gone back to many times. He's solid and always timeless."

Originally published as part of Andersen's fifth volume of fairy tales in 1848, *The Little Match Girl* is an original Andersen story inspired by a Johan Thomas Lundbye drawing and loosely based on an incident that happened to Andersen's mother when she was a child. Written nine years after Andersen's friend and colleague Charles Dickens finished *Oliver Twist*, *The Little Matchgirl* shed a light on a very oppressed and silent group in Europe—its children. The author's tale spoke out for exploited children sent by their parents to beg in the streets and for children of all economic brackets living in a time when one out of every two children died before the age of five.

The task of translating Andersen's somber, poetic prose went to *The Lion*

*King* co-director Roger Allers, who continued with the project as it went from a musical feature to a short. The veteran director led a team of artists and painters during downtime from other work at Disney's Burbank and Paris studios to create the seven-minute short and turn Andersen's poignant words in to meaningful animation.

This was a challenge, in many ways, because the story of the match girl is also a study in contrasts: life vs. death; rich and poor; cold and warm, not just in temperature but also in temperament. "Our lead character goes through a lot of emotional changes," Allers observes "We see her plight with the bitter cold, and we see her shift in and out of visions of comfort and escape. Aesthetically it was a big challenge to make the shifts from dream back to reality."

Finding music with the right sort of feeling was important, which Don Hahn did with Alexander Borodin's dreamlike *String Quartet No. 2 in D Major: Third Movement: Notturmo (Andante)*. It also became the inspiration to move the Christmastime story to the isolated streets of pre-revolutionary Russia. "The Borodin piece has so much pathos in it, and seemed to fit the construction of the story so well. Once Roger





**Sad Eyes:** (clockwise from top left) character design by Randy Hancock, Mike Surrey, background design by Mike Humphries and watercolor by Hans Bacher.



put the storyboards to music," executive producer Roy E. Disney notes, "you couldn't help look at it and go 'Oh, that really works!'"

Early during production Allers decided the film should be done using 2D pencil animation and have a hand-painted look to it. Some of that inspiration is owed to the character designs of Randy Haycock and the thoughtful watercolors of Hans Bacher, which became the springboard for some elaborate computer coloring. "One of our big challenges was figuring out how to integrate the characters into the [hand-painted] watercolor backgrounds," says the film's artistic coordinator Dave

Bossert. "We were able to do this in our CAPS system by processing the line drawings to give it the appearance that pigment pooled towards the edges of the paint shapes as it does in real watercolor paintings. We were also able to create a mottled grain within the painted character."

The production went on over a four-year period where Allers was asked to come back from projects outside Disney to attempt several alternate, more upbeat endings. Ultimately the executives let Allers restore his original ending, which was faithful to Andersen's original intent and is a mirror for our indifference today as much as it was in

the 1850s. "We're not in the business of sending political messages," Don Hahn explains. "But it is a story of hope and Roger wanted to be genuine and to his credit he persevered to the original story. In a way the ending is almost prayerful, too, without being religious. It was a way to show hope and that all children have a right to exist, and that's a really poetic notion." ■

**Ron Barbagallo is the director of Burbank-based Animation Art Conservation. You can visit his website at [www.animationartconservation.com](http://www.animationartconservation.com).**

***The Little Matchgirl* makes its world debut at the Annecy Festival in France on June 5, 2006.**

**SHORTS**



# The Short Road to Success

The brilliant, artistic and personal shorts unspooling at Annecy are great antidotes for the mass-produced drivel that has been cranked out of the studios recently. **by Chris Grove**

If you think the current era of Hollywood is a Dark Age of sorts—with its endless franchises (*Batmans*, *Spider-Mans*, *Potters*, *Rings*, *M:ls* etc.), formulaic feature-length cartoons and sense-deprivation bombast from the likes of Bay and Cohen et. al.—then the Augustinian monks keeping film language alive and expanding are probably the bunch of iconoclasts who have straight jobs by day and produce edgy, near-blasphemous animation at night. While their garage workshops aren't exactly analogous to a chilly monastery on a windy island off the Scottish coast, they are an outpost of low-paid (if at all) creativity where ideas can bloom and grow sans committees, focus groups or test screenings.

Ample proof of this theory is on display in Annecy 2006's rich collection of short animated films. Usually very funny, often viciously honest and occasionally poignant, this year's crop is as good as any in recent memory. Case in point: Joanna Quinn's *Dreams and Desires—Family Ties*. The 10-minute film is, ironically, part of a franchise of sorts in the short-film world. It's the third film to feature the exploits of the anti-heroine Beryl, a boozy, chain-smoking Welsh housewife trying to figure out what to do with her life. In this chapter she gets a video camera and, armed with an autodidact's knowledge of movie history, sets off to film a family wedding. And as with any great comedy, things almost immediately go horribly wrong. At one point a very drunk Beryl straps the camera to her friend's dog and commands him to: "Film truth!" before crashing face down onto the kitchen table. Annecy 2006 is the film's official debut.

"I make films about people I know," says Quinn from her home in Cardiff. "The strength of people you meet, who may be living in difficult circumstances yet retain their sense of humor and love of life, is always inspiring." So her films don't poke fun at people, but elevate the normality of life as opposed to the extraordinary.

Beryl made her first appearance in Quinn's college project *Girl's Night Out* produced in 1987. That film, and the follow-up, *Body Beautiful*, won a slew of awards. Two of her other films, *Famous Fred* and *The Wife of Bath* received Oscar nominations in 1998 and 1999 respectively. You can see examples of her distinctive line-drawn animation at [beryl-productions.co.uk/main.htm](http://beryl-productions.co.uk/main.htm). *Family Ties* took a couple of years to make, as Quinn makes a living creating award-winning TV ads and children's programming by day. The whole film is drawn by hand—with Quinn doing the equivalent of key frames, while collaborator Andy McPherson animates. "I couldn't do it all myself," says Quinn, "Andy is invaluable." To keep things consistent, she re-touches McPherson's images before they're scanned into the computer and composited in After Effects. This film is a co-prod between Quinn's company, Beryl Productions, and Welsh Channel 4.

While Beryl and her family have a touch of Dylan Thomas, the world of another Annecy 2006 animated short, Run Wrake's *Rabbit*, has a much darker tone. What would eventually become the film's central images were bought by Wrake in a junk shop 20 years ago. Only he didn't know it at the time. "They were a collection of 1950s-era children's educational stickers, and I just thought they looked interesting," says the London-based Wrake. He stuffed them in a drawer and promptly forgot about them. A few years ago, when he was clearing out his office, there they were again. "The instant I saw them, I knew I had to make a film with them."

One of the icons was a bizarre idol image used for the letter "I." It's the idol, along with a boy and a girl and a rabbit that form the nucleus of a black, cautionary tale about greed. (See

Joanna Quinn's *Dreams and Desires - Family Ties*

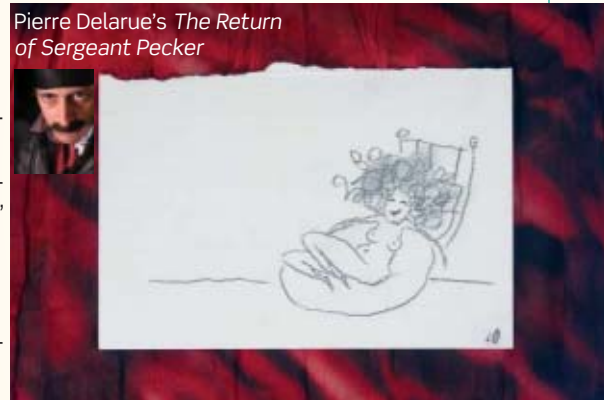


© Beryl Productions International, Ltd

Andy Huang's *Doll Face*



Pierre Delarue's *The Return of Sergeant Pecker*



© Why Not Animation

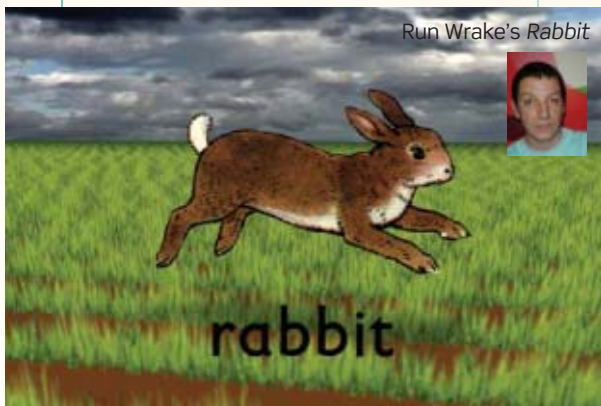
[runwrake.com](http://runwrake.com) for an excerpt.) "Most of my stuff comes out dark," says Wrake with a chuckle. "Dark, but funny." Wrake worked on the film in a manner similar to Quinn's, after hours when he wasn't working his day job making animated music videos, commercials and logos. He is a graduate of both the Chelsea School of Art and the Royal College of Art. *Rabbit* was produced using a simple process. The images of the stickers were scanned into the computer as a whole and in their individual parts. Wrake filmed some live-action templates on digital video of a friend running in a local park and around his house. After Effects was used to composite.

Perhaps the most itinerant production process was used by neophyte filmmaker Pierre Delarue. The two-minute *The Return of Sergeant Pecker* is also debuting at Annecy. It's Delarue's first cinematic work. Because the





Daniel Sousa's *Fable*



Run Wrake's *Rabbit*

entire film was drawn on little cards, location was not a problem. "I made drawings everywhere," says Delarue, "in airport cafes, in the park or watching my girlfriend make coffee." Delarue produced the film at Vincent Ferri's Annecy-based Why Not Animation facility.

Delarue is a graphic artist whose specialty is erotica. "I love women and the stimulating situation between men and women in love or in lust," he says. In *The Return of Sergeant Pecker*, Delarue borrows an image from German graphic artist Horst Janssen, and uses it to make, what the filmmaker calls "an absurd" cartoon about the ritual of lovemaking. "It's not pornography," he says, "and it's very funny."

Two other films of note at Annecy 2006 are Andy Huang's *Doll Face* and Daniel Sousa's *Fable*. Sousa's images are about as far as you can get from the neon world of most Disney or DreamWorks animated films. Maybe it's the zeitgeist of the times, but this film is also a dark story. In this case, a fairy tale about a man and a woman who are cursed to be apart.

They both have the ability to transform themselves into animals and when they do the other one is compelled to hunt the other one down (see [danielsousa.com](http://danielsousa.com)).

*Fable* is one of the Annecy films that was mainly brought to life using Flash technology. To achieve the film's look of animated color charcoal drawings, Sousa put some of the images on acetate and rubbed them with ink to soften and blur the edges. A true mixed-media work, the backgrounds were culled from photographs, paintings and collages.

Finally, one of the youngest and more remarkable talents in this year's shorts program is Andy Huang, a 21-year old USC undergrad ([betweenframes.com/dollface.htm](http://betweenframes.com/dollface.htm)). Animation is a minor subject for Huang, but based on the talent on display in his film *Doll Face*, he will be a major player for any company smart enough to hire him. Unavailable at press time because of final exams, Huang's website describes the film, in part, as: "A visual account of the experience of post-modernity and the anxieties that accompany our technological extension of the future." And you thought only you felt that way! ■

*Accolades*

Skyland won the Best TV series award for Action and Adventure, produced with Method Films for Nickelodeon at Cartoons on the Bay PULCINELLA AWARDS 2006

Todd World Nominated for EMMY 2006

And Yet It Moves 80 minute Feature won 'The Best Animated Feature Film' co-produced by DQE with Mike Young Productions

bro'Town T.V. Series won two of the highest honors in comedy television at the New-Zealand Screen Awards.

Todd World 52 X 11 nominated for EMMY 2005. Programme created for Discovery Kids with Mike Young Productions.

Red Herring 100 Asia "Best Private Company" Winner 2005

Tapass Chakravarti, Executive Producer and the C.E.O of DQ, won the "Best Entrepreneur Of the Year" award for 2005.

Annecy Frame 2004 Award for Delta State 26x26

DELTA STATE 26 x 26min BAF 2004 Awards FICCI Frames, India Nominees for BAF 2004 Awards TV Series Award: Hozze Houndz 26 x 10 min Silver Wings 26 x 26 min

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# Out of This World

Get schooled in history, social issues and animated aliens while you beat the heat. **by Sarah Gurman**

## Galaxy High School, Vol. 1 [Media Blasters, \$9.95]

Though *Galaxy High School* only had a short run in 1986 on the CBS Sunday morning block, it developed a loyal following. In fact, the devout fans even started an online petition begging for the 13 existing episodes of the show to be released on DVD. Well, AnimeWorks, a division of Media Blasters, is finally giving the toon alien lovers what they want, releasing

episodes one through seven on the first volume DVD this month, and eight through 13 on the second volume next month. The series delivers the story of Aimee and Doyle, two Earth-dwelling students who get chosen to attend Galaxy High School, an eclectic melting pot for creatures from all over the universe.

In the old Earth days, Aimee was very reserved and Doyle always ran with the popular crowd, but they switch roles at their new school. Aimee feels right at home with her oddball classmates like Gilda Gossip (voiced by the great Nancy Cartwright) who has multiple mouths and the ever absent-minded Booeey Bubblehead. (Yes, he has a bubble for a head!) Created by Chris Columbus, the bright mind behind the '80s creature classics *Gremlins* and *The Goonies* (who also directed the first two Harry Potter movies), and directed by Saburo Hashimoto (*Gargoyles*, *The Return of Jafar*), Toshiyuki Hiruma (*Leo the Lion*) and Sam Nicholson (*Crusader Rabbit*), the show also features a fab theme song courtesy of former Eagles member Don Felder. Overall, *Galaxy High School's* brand of twisted teen angst is a good excuse to take a break from the sun.

## Leroy & Stitch [Disney, \$26.99]

Kids just can't get enough of *Lilo & Stitch*, Chris Sanders' cute blue alien thread that keeps on giving. So on the heels of the finale of *Lilo and Stitch: The Series*, Disney is releasing another direct-to-DVD adventure that finds Lilo, Stitch, Pleakley and Jumbo part-



ing ways after successfully rounding up all of the 625 experiments. However, the gang has to reunite when their long-time nemesis, Dr. Hämsterviel, escapes from jail and creates a doozy of a doppleganger: experiment 627, Stitch's evil twin Leroy. To make matters worse, the doc has cloned Stitch's ill-mannered counterpart forcing the crew to take on an army of Leroy's. Luckily they have all 625 of Stitch's experimental cousins ready to help. The new 73-minute outing is directed by Tony Craig and Robert Gannaway and features the voices of Daveigh Chase, Chris Sanders, David Ogden Stiers, Tia Carrere, Rob Paulsen, Zoe Caldwell and Ving Rhames. A never-before-seen episode of *Lilo and Stitch: The Series* and the Big Red Battleship Flight Simulator Game are also included in the package. Now that's something to write to your home planet about.

## The Boondocks: The Complete First Season [Sony, \$49.95]

The revolution might just be televised. And animated at that, thanks to Aaron McGruder's award-winning comic strip turned series, *The Boondocks*. Since its premiere in November, the show has been treating [adult swim] viewers to candid cartoon social commentary that pushes the envelope on issues like race relations, black archetypes and government policy. *The Boondocks* centers on the quirky escapades of the Freemans, a black family helmed by Robert "Grand-

dad" Freeman (the excellent John Witherspoon), who becomes the legal guardian of his grandkids Huey, a 10-year-old left wing radical, and his aspiring gangsta younger brother Riley (both voiced by Regina King) and moves them from Chicago's Southside to upscale

Woodcrest. Sony is offering fans all 15 culture-clashing episodes from the first season uncut and uncensored on DVD with cool extras like deleted scenes, commentary from McGruder and a behind-the-scenes featurette. The three-disc release holds classic episodes like "The Itis," which serves up the hilarious results of Granddad bringing the joys and cholesterol of soul food to the pre-

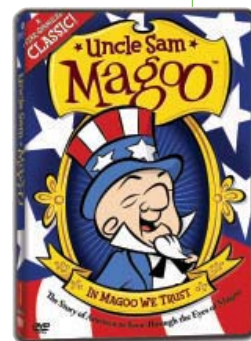
dominantly white residents of Woodcrest, and the now infamous "Return of the King" that imagines Martin Luther King coming out of a coma after 32 years and finding himself in post 9/11 America. Extra kudos to the crew calling the show's music shots: The opening theme from Asheru and MF Doom interludes are much appreciated.

## Uncle Sam Magoo [Sony, \$9.98]

Need to brush up on U.S. History? Pick up *Uncle Sam Magoo* on DVD this month and

join the stars and stripes bedecked Mr. Magoo on a whirlwind tour of key moments in America's development. The 1970 hour-long special revisits everything from the Pilgrims arriving at Plymouth Rock to Teddy Roosevelt's charge up San Juan Hill to the Apollo moon landing. UPA's near-sighted and bumbling

main man seems an appropriate choice to play Uncle Sam as he has a wealth of experience in the role-playing department. During the short-lived series, *The Famous Adventures of Mr. Magoo*, he took on the personas of key historical and literary figures like Paul Revere, the Count of Monte Cristo and William Tell. It's worth grabbing a copy of *Uncle Sam Magoo* just to hear Jim Backus' distinctive voice work. Of course, a little non-partisan patriotic mojo is always helpful right around the 4th of July holiday. ■







## Natural Selection

National Wildlife Federation joins forces with Sunwoo Entertainment and S4 Studios to bring up *Wild Animal Baby*, a preschool project mixing live-action with CG animation.

**A**h, to be a preschooler these days! Only so many waking hours in a day and so many primo animated DVD releases that teach a thing or two about the world while being darn entertaining as well. The latest addition to the quality crop is *Wild Animal Baby*, a six-tittle series of DVD shows from the folks at National Wildlife Federation, Sunwoo Entertainment and S4 Studios. Based on NWF's award-winning kids magazine, the DVDs use a cool mixture of live-action footage and 3D animation that introduce young ones to natural sciences.

"At NWF, we believe the earlier children learn about wildlife, the more likely they will grow up to be stewards of the natural world," says Tony Summers, exec in charge of production at Natural Wildlife Federation. "*Wild Animal Baby* is an entertaining way to learn fascinating facts about animals. Hopefully it will inspire parents and kids to get outdoors and see it all first hand!"

Among the boisterous beastly cast of the project are Izzy the Owl, Skip the

Rabbit, Rosie the River Otter and Sandy the Salamander, who introduce the denizens of their world to home viewers. As Summers puts it, "The animal investigative team wants to know about anything that squirms, wiggles, blossoms, shakes, flies or digs!"

To bridge the project to the animation, NWF went to the folks at Sunwoo Entertainment and S4 Studios. "Although the animation was originally planned as 2D, we felt CG animation and multi-media better served our needs as we went along," says Sunwoo USA's president and CEO Jae Moh. "The show also incorporates Flash animation in sequences where educational objectives are explained as well as CG animation (using Maya 7.0 technology) for the animal characters."

S4 Studios (Cartoon Network's *The*



Jae Moh



Tony Summers

*Groovenians*), under the direction of Larry Le Francis and Dale Hendrickson, worked closely with Sunwoo's producers Jae Woo Park and Brian Odell to adapt the 2D print characters to 3D.

According to the producers, they are in talks with a major broadcaster to package the *Wild Animal Baby* franchise as a TV series in the next few months. The

DVDs are currently available through the membership channels of the NWF, including the website ([www.nwf.org](http://www.nwf.org)), which has over four million members. The producers plan to have the releases out in retail stores by the end of the summer. There have also been talks with a major U.S. broadcaster to produce a regular TV series based on the DVDs in the near future.

"We are quite proud of the fact that this is one of the first preschool shows that introduces viewers to natural sciences



on their own level," says Moh. "I think it's always challenging to stay faithful to the values and integrity of a well-respected company like National Wildlife Federation, to be scientifically accurate, be educational and entertain kids at the same time. I'm happy to say we've delivered on all fronts." ■

For more info about *Wild Animal Baby* (\$12.95 per DVD), visit [www.nwf.org/kidZone](http://www.nwf.org/kidZone).

# MTV2 Sicks the Dogs on Animation

New toon block offers canines, cage matches and Chico.

by Ryan Ball

**L**ike its sister network, MTV2 isn't just about music these days. Having achieved some ratings success with reruns of *Beavis & Butt-Head* and the clay-animated Hollywood skewer fest known as *Celebrity Deathmatch*, the cabler has made a commitment to original animation production and hopes to lure adults out of a certain pool with its own toon block. Launching on Saturday, June 10, MTV2's animation lineup includes fresh episodes of *Deathmatch* and two new series titled *Where My Dogs At?* and *Chico and Guapo*.

The animation block is part of MTV2's effort to attract more young male viewers, and the network is hoping more hits like its subversive cult fave, *Wonder Showzen*, a twisted *Sesame Street* spoof that features animated shorts produced in part by New York's Augenblick Studios, are part of MTV2's "Sick'em Friday" lineup.

Tony DiSanto is exec VP of series development and animation at MTV and head of programming at MTV2. He tells us the network has identified animation as one thing their viewers are really into and that building a solid animation block is a major goal.

"Animation is a huge priority for me and for all of us here," DiSanto comments. "We have high hopes for this block and I want to keep feeding it. I would hate to have our viewers get really excited about this block, become hooked on it and then have

these shows run out

without new stuff coming in. I'm looking to have short-form animation and I'm looking for new series. We have some stuff that's going to be coming in the next six months to add to the block, and I'm working on some pilots now that I'm hoping will be animated series early next year."

The very first toon project brought to DiSanto when he started in the animation department at MTV about a year and a half ago was *Where My Dogs At?*, created by comedian and "Roastmaster General" Jeffrey Ross and roast joke writer Aaron Lee. "Jeff's an old friend, and he came in and pitched this concept about a dog from Jersey who's lost in L.A. and basically gives us a dog's-eye view of the craziness of Hollywood and pop culture in general," DiSanto notes. "It also allows Jeff to do what he does best, which is roast people."

Ross lends his voice to a beagle named Buddy, who wants desperately to get back to his life as a house pet. During a brief stint in the pound, he teams up with a brawny, street-smart bulldog named Woof (voiced by *Saturday Night Live* alum Tracey Morgan) and together they have run-ins with such tabloid-feeding celebs as Lindsay Lohan and Tom Cruise. In one episode, the comic canines visit the Brad Pitt/Angelina Jolie household and get attacked by adopted child Maddox.

"I feel that with animation, we get

away with everything," Ross says. "MTV lets us push it, and it feels like we're completely full-throttle and driving a hundred miles an hour. As comedians, this is a dream come true, honestly."

Ross and Lee wanted celebrity caricatures similar to the Mort Drucker illustrations they'd grown up seeing in *Mad Magazine*. Using the humor publication as inspiration, Hollywood-based animation house Six Point Harness delivered Flash animation that harkens back to another time.

"We told them we really wanted a traditional, Looney Tunes-like look, like really classic stuff," Lee tells us. "With the celebrities and everything being so topical, it just grounds it in this really cool-looking traditional cartoon universe." Ross adds, "Our Scientologists look like they should

Where My Dogs At?



Aaron Lee



Jeffrey Ross

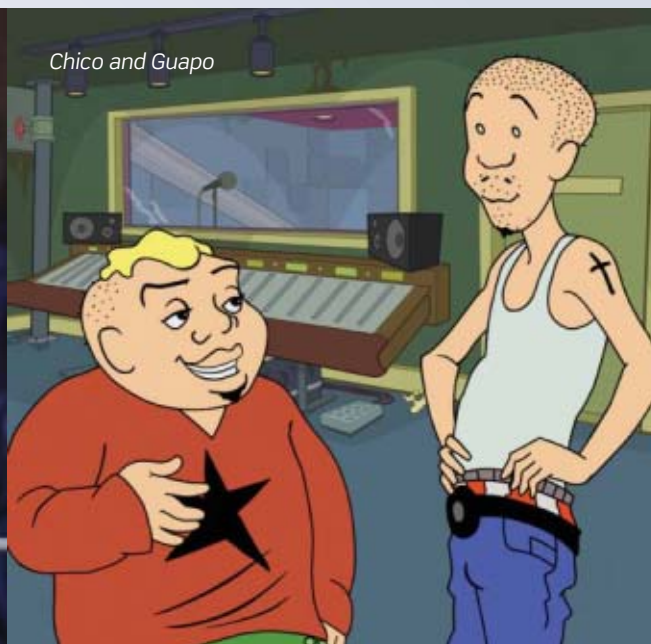


Tony DiSanto





Celebrity Deathmatch



Chico and Guapo

be on *The Jetsons*."

Like many Flash-animated shows being produced these days, *Dogs* really pushes the software to the limit. The episodes are drawn in pencil, cleaned in Illustrator, animated in Flash and composited in After Effects. Lee comments, "Six Point Harness is so good and their stuff is so amazing that we've shown it to a lot of people, including animators, who had no idea it was Flash. They just assumed it was traditionally animated."

"We actually get to share offices with the animation team, and seeing it come to life and being able to give our input right there in person is, I think, why the show's going to work," says Ross, adding, "We have 40 animators chained to their computers. It's like a sweatshop."

All joking aside, Ross praises the talents of animation director Greg Franklin of Six Point Harness. "Greg really gets how comics deliver jokes. He sort of lingers on Buddy's face a lot—the eye movements and facial expressions—which I don't think I've ever seen in a cartoon before. He's a real cartoon comedian."

Actor Orlando Jones (TV's *The Evidence*), who previously lent his voice to DreamWorks' NBC primetime toon, *Father of the Pride*, co-created *Chico and Guapo*. The Flash-animated series is an extension of a cartoon bit that appeared on the short-

lived, late-night talker *The Orlando Jones Show*. Each episode starts and ends with Chico and Guapo channel surfing and critiquing TV shows a la *Beavis & Butt-Head*. But where sluggish thought processes were the order of the day on that series, the witty repartee between Chico and Guapo is so rapid-fire that one really has to watch each episode more than once to catch all the jokes. The rest of the show focuses on the duo's misadventures in the music industry as they hold down jobs at indie label Angelo Productions.

"It's gone through various incarnations of development," DiSanto says of *Chico and Guapo*'s transition from short-form to series. "We initially tried doing just one story over the course of a half hour like a sit-com. Then we looked at it and thought the thing that made these shorts work so well originally was that they were short. You got to the point of the story, you got to the joke and they were just lean, mean and funny."

Created by Eric Fogel, *Celebrity Deathmatch* previously aired on MTV from 1998 to 2002. Produced in association with The Comedy Network, the new episodes carry on the tradition of employing stop-motion animation to pit clay-and-foam versions of public figures against one another in bloody wrestling matches. The premiere episode kicks off

with a vicious catfight between former gal pals Paris Hilton and Nicole Ritchie, followed by a showdown between *Jackass* stuntster Bam Margera and skateboarding legend Tony Hawk.

"The repeats of *Celebrity Deathmatch* have actually done really well and definitely sparked the idea of diving back in to make some new ones," says DiSanto, who insists everyone involved is dedicated to pleasing fans by staying true to the look and feel of the previous series. Under animation directors Lola Leo, Normand Rompre and Sylvie Trouvé, production house Cuppa Coffee has updated the puppet style to make them a bit cleaner and more detailed. Everything else is business as usual, except for the fact that clay commentator Nick Diamond has returned from the three-year hiatus with a boob job.

MTV2 faces some tough competition of its own as it enters the arena of late-night animation, currently the domain of Cartoon Network's [adult swim]. However, judging by these three initial offerings, the network is off to a good start and may just have what it takes to be a contender. Let's just hope there's no death and dismemberment involved in this showdown. ■

**The new animation block premieres Saturday, June 10, on MTV2. For more info, visit [mtv2.com](http://mtv2.com).**



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# The Girl of His Dreams

Jim Jinkins, the creator of Noggin's *Pinky Dinky Doo*, talks about the show's inspiration and his future plans for *Doug*.

by Ramin Zahed

**Toon** aficionados remember Jim Jinkins as the imaginative artist/author/illustrator behind the popular children's series such as *Doug*, *PB&J Otter*, *101 Dalmatians* and *JoJo's Circus*. Last month, he and his Cartoon Pizza partner David Campbell came back in the limelight with a charming new preschool show called *Pinky Dinky Doo*, which airs daily on Noggin. Based on Jinkins' books of the same name, each episode of the show features two, eight-minute stories about an imaginative girl called Pinky, her younger brother Tyler, her guinea pig, Mr. Guinea Pig, and other friends and family members. The 26-episode show has a unique visual style which places Flash-animated characters against photo collage backgrounds. We caught up with Jinkins on a typically busy work day in New York City to get the skinny on the new show:

**Animation Magazine:** Tell us about the idea behind the new show. How did you come up with the concept?

**Jinkins:** I first made it up as a bedtime story for my kids who were five and three at the time. My daughter asked me to tell them a story, and it made them laugh. It was a silly story about a young girl and her brother. When I was trying to get my daughter to get ready for school, I'd have silly conversations with her, I'd say, "So should you wear a wedge of cheese on your head? Do you want to wear a pony on your head? So that's how Pinky talks. She makes up these fantastic stories for her younger brother. We're targeting a higher-end of the preschool audience. Pinky is seven and her brother is four years old. It has bright colors, silly images and great music.

**The look of the show is very childlike, and it definitely gives the impression that a child could've come up with the drawings.**

**Jinkins:** My daughter played a big role in imagining Pinky. Once I started to draw the characters, she said, "Oh that's not what she looks like." And she helped me out by drawing them as she saw them. She drew the three freckles on her cheek, her pink hair, the striped leggings ... I then just drew on top of her drawing. The whole look of the show is really inspired by her drawing. She's a budding artist! We then decided it would be a cool idea to put these naïve-style drawings against collage-style photographic backgrounds, which we composite in Photoshop.

**How do you think the TV animation scene has changed since you first created *Doug* for TV?**

**Jinkins:** Back in the day, when *Doug* was first sold to Nick, it was the beginning of something that was quite unique at the time, and that was the launch of creative-driven properties on TV. Fifteen years later, there's an enormous amount of animation out there. It's definitely more competitive now, and there are lots more places for little eyeballs to go to. Of course, kids and discerning parents are benefiting from this abundance of choices. I also felt that there weren't too many preschool shows that had solid content. Many of them were too earnest and weren't silly and funny at the same time.

**What do you love most about working in animation for kids?**

**Jinkins:** The most fun thing about it is that my kids approve of what I do. They love to watch all the different steps. I've also had some extraordinary opportunities to go to schools and summer camps to read these stories out loud, show them some of the episodes and take in their comments. We partner with Sesame Workshop and take part in all kinds of outreach and research, and it's exciting to meet the kids and their parents.

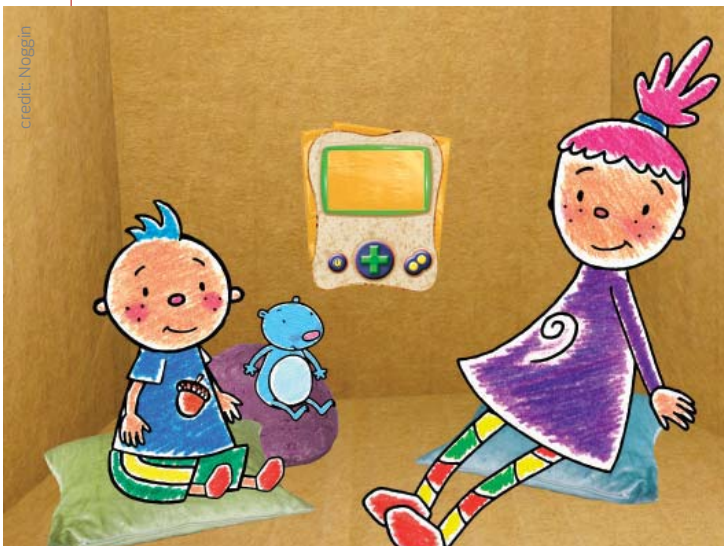
**Is there anything new in the works for *Doug*?**

**Jinkins:** I do believe that we're not done with *Doug*. That character will be my first love. It was a very personal project and it changed my life. I have a Broadway type of show in mind for *Doug*. People always ask me, "When is *Doug* going to kiss Patty?" Well, I am thinking of following *Doug* after he graduates from college and tries to be an artist in New York City, and he finds out that Patty has also ended up in the city, right across Central Park. The kids who grew up with *Doug* are now in their twenties, so it would be a great way for them to catch up with these characters.

**How do you feel about the new platforms for animation?**

**Jinkins:** I think TV will always be an important part of the animation world and how we tell stories. But we've definitely seen the shift to Internet, and I can see how it impacts my kids. There's no guarantee that the TV will be on, but they are likely to watch interactive programming that we approve of online. In the old days, we never dreamed that a screen as small as a cell phone could be an ideal medium for certain types of animation. Today, we provide all kinds of fun interactive stuff on *Noggin.com* that promotes early literacy. I, on the other hand, do a lot of my work with pencil on notebook paper during my hour-long train commute from Waccabuc to the city. Sitting on that train helps me come up with all kinds of ideas for *Pinky Dinky Doo*! ■

***Pinky Dinky Doo* airs on Noggin at 10 a.m. and 3 p.m. (E.S.T.) and 7 a.m. and 12 p.m. (P.S.T.).**







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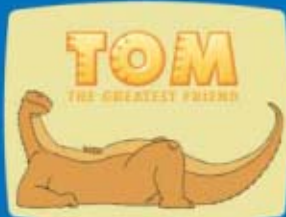
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## The Padded Cel

# Guns Don't Kill People. Bad TV Kills People



by Robby London

This column's regular readers (an oxymoron if ever there was one) may recall that last month we rolled our editorial eyes at a recent "study" entitled "Wolves In Sheep's Clothing." It indicted the amounts of "violence" (otherwise known as action) and "inappropriate humor" (otherwise known as fun) in cartoons. I predicted that politicians seeking election would be irresistibly drawn to this as a campaign issue like ... well, like a horny dog to my leg. (Oddly, I seem to have acquired a reputation in the local canine community for giving good shin.) Anyway, sure enough, Senator Sam

Brownback eagerly swooped in to lay claim to the "protect-our-children" banner raised by this "study."

"Bingo!" I thought, using the only contemporary, youthful slang deemed appropriate for children's television. But, to my surprise, I learned Brownback's Senate term is ending and he is *not* running for reelection. Disappointed—but in keeping with the standards of journalistic integrity and objectivity to which I am committed—I made no mention of Senator Brownback because he contradicted my theory! But wait! Right after we went to press I learned that Brownback is contemplating an election bid after all—for President! Point, set, match. Er ... bingo!

This month, the government war to eliminate weapons of mass moral destruction continued to escalate. The FCC fined CBS stations running *Without A Trace*—a primetime series running at 10 p.m.—a re-



Illustration by Mercedes Milligan

cord \$3.6 million for an allegedly indecent portrayal lasting a few seconds. Unfortunately, I missed it: I was distracted shaking yet another sex-starved schnauzer from my leg. But there has been a chilling effect on the broadcast and creative communities with this fine coming on top of the "Nipplegate" fines just over a year ago. Yes...Ollie, another fine mess. Apparently the government intends to pay for Iraq by collecting broadcaster fines, with the side benefit of eliminating costly constitutional amendments, starting with, oh say, the first one.

But hold on just one Big-Brother second! We *want* our government to protect us, right? Before we are too quick to criticize the good intentions of our representatives, consider these startling facts about television culled from the little known study unearthed called *Television—Secret Killer, Hidden Fiend!* 1) Thirty-nine people were

fatally electrocuted last year watching television in the bathtub while simultaneously trying to extract a coin from their toaster with a knife. 2) A Bolivian wrestler was critically injured in the ring when his opponent, El Diablo Gigundo, smashed him over the head with a 32" cathode-ray television console. (The league has since ruled that wrestlers must be limited to 13" plasma screens as bludgeons.) 3) 31.3% of recovering alcoholics fell off the wagon by mixing a martini on top of their TV set. 4) Police found a television set in 83.8% of all the meth

houses they busted. 5) One hack columnist used his TV remote to club an aroused schnauzer to death and 6) In the only *programming*-related finding cited, 63% of diabetics suffering an insulin shock event reported the most recently viewed program to be a *Brady Bunch* rerun.

So rather than being too quick to mourn the First Amendment (after all, the nine remaining entries in the Bill of Rights should be plenty), or to point out the perfectly serviceable voluntary options already in place to "protect our children," ranging from the V-chip to the "off" switch, never forget: "Guns don't kill people, TV kills people!" Isn't it about time to get these dangerous weapons off the streets? ■

**Robby London is a toon industry veteran who has been spending too much of his time reading dubious government reports on *Itchy and Scratchy*.**



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for. Steve Savage and I don't deal well with rules, so the idea of working in this twisted universe—which is kind of like those Far Side cartoons—with lots of freedom really appealed to us.”

Both Kopp and Conrad point out that one of the challenges faced by the Hollywood-

based animation team was taking figures that were basically flat greeting-card animals and turning them into 3D characters which would sometimes walk on all fours and sometimes stand on two hind legs.

Loesch says she was very pleased that her company was able to produce all the animation in Los Angeles. “During my years at other TV production studios, we were always hoping that we could keep animation work in-house and not have to ship things overseas, but it was a cost issue back then. We just knew that advances in technology were going to bring the business back home.”

Although this particular project is created using 3ds max software, the folks at The Hatchery say they're also considering using Flash technology for their other projects in development. Meanwhile, American Greetings plans to have a huge presence at this month's Licensing Show in New York City, where a couple of the *Twisted Whiskers* shorts will be on display at the company's booth. There have also been talks of taking the crazy critters to the next level with broadband projects, a TV show and even a big-screen feature.

As Kopp is quick to remind us, “It's all about having funny characters and situations, but you can't forget to add in that essential ingredient—which is a touch of heart.” ■

For more information, visit [www.thehatcheryllc.com](http://www.thehatcheryllc.com) or [www.americangreetings.com](http://www.americangreetings.com).

## Wide-Eyed Wonders

American Greetings and The Hatchery team up to bring Twisted Whiskers to animated life. by Ramin Zahed

**T**wisted Whiskers may not be a household name yet, but greeting card aficionados have already discovered the appeal of American Greetings' clever line of wide-eyed cats and dogs.

Tagged as the fastest moving summer card line produced by the company, the line is getting a very cool animated treatment thanks to the talents of industry vets Savage Steve Holland and Bill Kopp (*Eek! The Cat, Better Off Dead*) and Margaret Loesch, CEO of L.A.-based family entertainment house, The Hatchery. The team is currently producing a series of nine 30- to 60-second CG-animated shorts featuring the mischievous pets, in association with American Greetings' senior VP of creative, Jeffrey Conrad.

“Some of the most durable characters in animation history were originally introduced

in the short format,” says Loesch. “We believed that by investing in these shorts, we could develop the Twisted Whiskers and really see what works and what doesn't in the long run. The show bible evolves as we see what comes up with each episode. We are making our rules about their universe as we go along.”

An Emmy-winning producer and veteran TV animation exec, Loesch was the founding president and CEO of Crown Media and the Hallmark Channel, as well as the CEO of Fox Kids network, the Jim Henson TV Group Worldwide and Marvel Productions. “The fact that the shorts are inspired by characters that were a hit in another medium gave us the rare latitude and freedom to let them evolve in a new CG-animated world.”

Kopp, who worked with Loesch on the popular *Eek! the Cat* series in the '90s and directed the *Tom and Jerry Blast Off to Mars* video last year says the creative team wanted to create characters that were both weird and charming at the same time. “We weren't after just coming up with one crazy gag after another,” he notes. “It was important for us to have an underdog, Chaplinesque hero that the audience could root



Margaret Loesch



Bill Kopp



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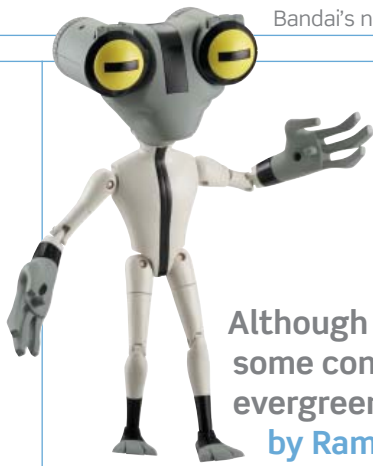
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Bandai's new Ben 10 Grey Matter toy lands on Earth.

## The Show Must Go On!

Although new interactive gizmos are on the rise, some continue to rely on extreme makeovers of evergreen brands at New York's Licensing Show. **by Ramin Zahed and Sarah Gurman**

Only a few weeks after Memorial Weekend each year, toy and merchandising execs get ready to put on their time-traveling gear for the annual Licensing Show in New York City (June 20-22). While your average consumer is preparing for the onslaught of this summer's movie-related toys—*Cars*, *Superman Returns*, *Over the Hedge*, *X-Men: The Last Stand* and *Pirates of the Caribbean: Dead Man's Chest*, to name a few—industry pros will be gearing up for items that will keep the masses entertained in 2007.

Take Juli Boylan, senior VP of consumer products at Sony Pictures, for example. One of her big focus points at the show is merchandising plans for Sony Feature Animation's second release *Surf's Up*, which opens a year after the studio's first big project *Open Season* hits theaters. "I'm very proud of the animation we've seen so far," says Boylan. "Of course, it's always tough to sell the property when it's still in

bey Maguire, Kirsten Dunst and James Franco as well as new villains portrayed by Thomas Haden Church (Sandman) and Dylan Baker (The Lizard) and will open on May 4, 2007.

The folks at Cartoon Network's recently launched Consumer Products division are hoping that toys connected to the cabler's latest offerings will prove as popular as the shows themselves. "Our focus for the Licensing Show is *Ben 10*, which will have a new line of toys from Bandai America launching this month and *Foster's Home for Imaginary Friends* as well," says Christina Miller, VP of CN's U.S. Consumer Products.

Among the hot new *Ben 10* tie-ins are collectible figures which morph into operational spy gear, such as binoculars, flashlights or water shooters, as well as vehicles, play-sets and role-play and trading cards. Miller sees the interactive category and the new consoles as two huge areas of growth. "The trend continues to be multi-

lookout for *Harry Potter and the Order of Phoenix*, while the studio also gets ready to pump its A-List features, *Happy Feet* and *Where the Wild Things Are*.

"Although our main focus will be on our properties and brands, we'll have two big displays featuring products from around the world," says Kelly Gilmore, senior VP of global toys and themed entertainment at Warner Bros. Consumer Products. "The two showcased brands are Superman and Tweety."

Spanish toon house BRB has plans for three of its hot new animated series, *Bernard*, *Iron Kid* and *Khudayana*. Although these great looking shows may not be household names on the American market yet, they have generated great word of mouth overseas and have been sold in numerous territories at recent TV markets. "For *Iron Kid*, we have developed ten action figures as well as a colorful trading card game," says BRB's licensing manager Jesus Diaz. "Another important arena for us is the videogame category: We have three different games developed for the Nintendo platforms."

While Disney/Pixar's *Cars* is sending ripples through the market this summer, the execs at the Mouse House's consumer products division will be spreading more pixie dust with the huge Disney Fairies brand, which officially launched in September 2005. More chapters books and a Disney Fairies magazine are in the works as are several DVD animated projects featuring Tinkerbell and her winged pals.

Then there's Disney's thriving preschool properties such as *Little Einsteins*,



*Shrek the Third* is ready for its new licensing suitors.

"The big trend I see this year is the use of music in children's products and electronics. Broadcasters are also seeking a wide variety of programs with different animation styles like the unique CG of the series *Miss BG*. I also foresee a surge in kids' game shows in primetime."

— Joy Tashjian, president of Joy Tashjian Marketing Group

development and the look of the feature is constantly evolving."

In addition to the big surfing penguin toon, Boylan has another powerful weapon in her arsenal: The third installment of the Spider-Man saga! She says, "This is a franchise that continues to grow and we have high hopes for it. We're seeing a lot of cool new items from Hasbro in conjunction with the *Spider-Man 3*." Directed by Sam Raimi, the movie stars original cast members To-

platform awareness. Companies need to be developing a 360 degree marketing plan that reaches people in all of areas."

CN's partner in crime, Warner Bros., will also have a wide variety of items to lure young consumers to stores this year. While all eyes are on Superman this summer, the company will also focus on some of its other popular superheroes, including Batman, Teen Titans, DC Originals and the Legion of Super Heroes. Wizards in training will be on the





Fans continue to go bananas for Universal's Curious George toys.



Sony Pictures Animation unveiled the plans for its upcoming *Open Season* during last year's show.

Mickey Mouse Clubhouse and Disney Channel's spring 2007 series, *My Friends Tigger and Pooh*. There will be massive consumer plans for each show as well as the studio's feature slate, which includes *Pirates of the Caribbean's* third outing (summer of 2007), *Enchanted* (a modern-day fairy tale which mixes live-action with animation) and the next big Pixar extravaganza, *Ratatouille*.

DreamWorks Animation Consumer Products, which is currently rolling in huge merch opportunities for *Over the Hedge*, is also casting its net for its next four movies, *Flushed Away*, *Shrek the Third*, *Bee Movie* and *Kung Fu Panda*. Rick Rekedal, the studio's main licensing man, says MGA (home of the Bratz empire) has brought a host of fresh toy ideas for *Shrek*, *Donkey* and *Puss in Boots*. "They also have a terrific Bratz-style take on Princess Fiona and her fairy-tale gang," he adds. "They even have a preschool sing-along *Shrek* toy that is totally hilarious."



Mattel and Warner Bros. hope to fly high this summer with a slew of electronic *Superman Returns* toys.

While Universal is still unleashing the market forces of *Curious George* (the new series premieres on PBS this fall), it's also reaping the rewards of *The Land Before Time* mega-franchise, as well as its hit SCI-Fi series *Battlestar Galactica*, and Watty Piper's classic children's book *The Little Engine That Could*.

At Fox, the product wizards are gearing up for the big *Simpsons* movie, which recently got a July 2007 release date. Elie Dekel, the division's exec VP of licensing and merchandising says he's really pleased with Hasbro's special Homer Simpson version of the Operation game and the *Family Guy* Monopoly, which sold out of its first production line in less than a month. He adds, "We also have some great titles coming out on the interactive front as well as a new game for *Eragon* by Vivendi Universal games."

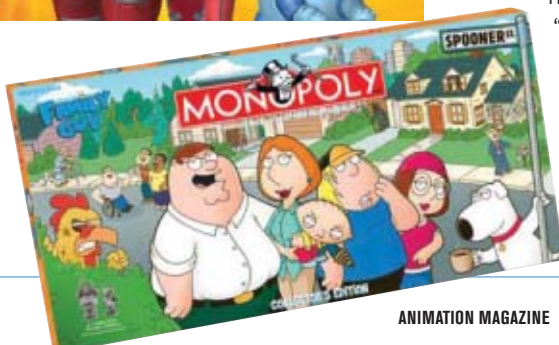
"The proliferation of mobile media is astounding," Dekel notes. "The wireless arena has, within a matter of years, become a viable platform for gaming, tv/movie content, news and promotions. The possibilities seem limitless right now." ■

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BRB's *Iron Kid* is a perfect platform for cool toys and collectibles.

Fox hit the jackpot with a special *Family Guy*-themed Monopoly game last month.

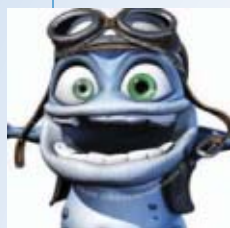


## LICENSING



# At a Glance

Here's a quick look at what some of the other major outfits are bringing to The Licensing Show:



**Al Ovadia & Associates, Inc.** TWF (Thumb Wrestling Federation), The Annoying Thing aka Crazy Frog, ZIXX, Mr. Gisby's *Totally Gay Pet Shop*, Bernard and The Eggs will all be making an appearance at the Javitz Center. Word on the street: Crazy Frog has a new album coming in July with Queen's "We Are The Champions" as the lead single and Mr. Gisby's *Totally Gay Pet Shop* has made an agreement with Moviegoods for the creation of an online store.

**Alliance Atlantis.** The company recently announced agreements with Adorable Kids Inc. to develop sleepwear and underwear and with Calego Int'l to develop line of bags, backpacks and other accessories for *Lunar Jim*.

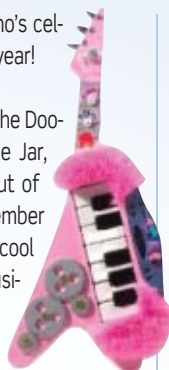
**CCI Entertainment.** *Harry and His Bucket full of Dinosaurs* is coming to play this year, and CCI promises that engaging and interactive tie-ins will be on shelves this August. The first *Harry* storybook is coming this August and will be followed by home videos in the fall.

**Celmates Licensing.** These merchandising masters are bringing fun brands for girls like Hey Poodle and Posh Betty, and cool threads like Ninjah!, Ghoulies, Robots and Mr. Tako-Yaki for the boys. Poodle is already being developed for comic books and an animated TV show. Corbis is marketing Ninjah! for use as cell phone content.

**Classic Media.** The folks at Classic are currently lining up some cool toys including action figures and board games in conjunction with the new *George of the Jungle* series which premieres in 2007. Casper's also making a comeback with his new direct-to-DVD *Casper's Scare School* which has a follow-up series in development. Keep your eyes peeled for Lassie, Underdog, Rudolph The Red

Nosed Reindeer and Dick Tracy, who's celebrating his 75th anniversary this year!

**Cookie Jar Entertainment.** The Doodlebops are all the rage at Cookie Jar, and soon after the national roll-out of CDs and DVDs in August/September 2006 kids can get their hands on cool Doodlebops rock'n roll lifestyle musical instrument toys from Mattel.



**DIC Entertainment.** DIC will debut three all-new properties, *Cake*, *Horseland* and *Dance Revolution*, which, in addition to developing a comprehensive consumer program, will premiere as a television series on the new CBS branded programming block, CBS's Saturday Morning Secret Slumber Party this fall. Strawberry Shortcake, Madeline, McDonald's Vintage Line and McKids Brand will also make a showing.

**EM. Entertainment GmbH.** A fun collection of properties including *Tabaluga*, *Vicky the Viking*, *Heidi*, *Flipper & Lopaka*, *Blinky Bill* and *Maya the Bee*, who's celebrating her 30th birthday in style with a road show through out Germany, will be in New York on July 20.



**Entertainment Rights.** This year will be the first time *Postman Pat* delivers at the Javitz Center. To coincide with his American debut, *Postman Pat* has earned a "first-class" endorsement from the United States Postal Service® for Washington 2006, the largest stamp exhibition ever held in the U.S.

**Geneon.** The anime powerhouse will be armed with *Chop Socky Chooks*, *Hellsing: The Ultimate Series*, *Ergo Proxy*, *Law of Ueki*, *Gun Sword*, *Elemental Gelade*, *Shana* and *Viewtiful Joe*. This fall Geneon will be launching a collectable figure line called TV Anime Head with licensee Level 5.



**HIT Entertainment.** HIT will be showcasing its classic animated preschool properties: *Angelina Ballerina* will take center stage with an expanded publishing program and new apparel and accessories, the *Bob the Builder* brand is moving into gaming and family events while *Thomas & Friends* is

developing lifestyle category tie-ins.

**The Joester Loria Group.** Little Robots will be making an appearance. Tie-ins will launch holiday 2006 and major product introductions are scheduled for 2007 with key partners including Penguin for publishing, Playmates for toys and Fox for home videos.

**Joy Tashjian Marketing Group, LLC.** Kidz Bop (Razor & Tie); Atomic Betty, Captain Flamingo and Miss BG (Breakthrough); Legend of the Dragon, Zorro Next Generation and King Kong (BKN) are among the fun properties on Joy's plate this year.

**MGA Entertainment.**

The big buzz is that Isaac Larian's pretty girls are set to hit the live-action feature world. In the meantime, MGA will bring the Bratz, Bratz Babyz, Yummi-Land and Story Time Princesses brands to the licensing lollapalooza.



**Porchlight Entertainment.** With the soaring marketing success of *Jay Jay The Jet Plane*, Porchlight will shift its focus to new properties at the show including *Animalia*, *Doodlez*, *The Secret World of Benjamin Bear*, and *Tutenstein*.

**Scholastic Media.** *Clifford The Big Red Dog* fans can look forward to a new line from JAKKS Pacific featuring a full range of plush, activity kits, figures, playsets, electronics, puzzles, lunch kits, slumber bags, kites and play tents. *Goosebumps*, *The Golden Compass*, *Maya & Miguel*, *The Magic School Bus*, *I Spy*, *Kim Parker Kids* and *Home Movies* will also have a presence at the confab.

**VooDoo Entertainment Inc. for Studio B Productions.** Studio B's *Yvon of the Yukon*, *D'Myna Leagues* and *Yakkity Yak* are on board for the event. The studio is looking to explore a range of tie-in opportunities for these shows from games,



figurines, plush, electronic type toys and playsets, to more property specific items like bedding, trading cards, posters, backpacks and Halloween costumes. ■

— Compiled by Sarah Gurman







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Photo courtesy of Warner Bros. Pictures

# Making a Superhero Soar Again

Mark Stetson shares a few vfx secrets about the making of *Superman Returns*. by Ron Magid

Although the talented folks at Warner Bros. Animation and the creators of TV's *Smallville* have been instrumental in keeping the Man of Steel's legacy alive on the small-screen, moviegoers haven't had a real live-action feature experience since the 1983 movie *Superman III*. That's why fans have high hopes for Bryan Singer's *Superman Returns*, which promises state-of-the-art movie magic supervised by Oscar-feted visual effects supervisor Mark Stetson (*The Lord of the Rings* trilogy, *The Fifth Element*.)

While Singer's film is a sequel of sorts to the revered *Superman* trilogy starring Christopher Reeve, the director's mandate to Stetson was to do the visuals to today's standards. Consequently Stetson spent nearly two years from the time he was hired in August 2004 rethinking and perfecting what it takes to make today's audiences believe a man can fly.

"It's very much about honoring the traditions," Stetson insists, "so we looked at the comic books and graphic novels for ideas—Alex Ross was a big inspiration. I was a fan of *Lois & Clark* and we looked at *Smallville* and even the old Fleischer cartoons. It's about the myth of Superman, it's not like you need to re-invent that. We've got a really strong character with a lot of history. We gained new respect for Christopher Reeve and the physical work he did, which was really strong

—just imagine applying digital technologies to the 1978 movie."

The late 1940s *Superman* serials, the earliest live-action incarnations of the all-American icon, employed traditional cel animation to make him soar. Actor Kirk Alyn would duck behind a wall and Superman would emerge as a cartoon, taking flight over Metropolis. In its crude way, the technique returned the character to his comic book roots and also foreshadowed digital effects.

"It's sort of what we're doing today but we're using all the tricks," Stetson says, adding that *Superman Returns'* flying effects ran the gamut from wirework to greenscreen to head replacements on stuntmen and full on digital doubles of newbie actor Brandon Routh. "He flies a lot. We've got around 1,400 vfx shots in the film and a third or more are flying shots. Sometimes he's on a box, sometimes he's on wires, and sometimes he's totally digital. From shot to shot we would make our best guess about what would work on a wire or on a gimbal, against greenscreen or on-set, and start from there." Pre-viz, courtesy of Pixel Liberation Front (supported later, when production shifted to Australia, by Rising Sun Pictures), was key from planning the structure and pace of the flying sequences through the final comps—in most cases.

"We had a really high standard of work in



pre-viz," Stetson says. "Still, when you go from there to real looking images, you have to make adjustments. The pacing that worked before doesn't work because you're seeing more detail in the scene and you realize you're blowing through it too fast. A lot of times, the camera moves were used exactly, other times we'd adapt them. If we had a move we could shoot tile-type plates for, we'd shoot all the tiles, then use character animation and camera animation from the pre-viz to create a move across the tiles."

VISUAL EFFECTS



## Meet Michael Dougherty, Super-Scribe!

Considering the comic-book legacy behind this summer's tentpole movie *Superman Returns*, it's a relief to know that that one of the film's screenwriters has major ties with the animation world. Michael Dougherty, who co-wrote the film's screenplay with Dan Harris, has made cool animated shorts such as *Crayons*, *Refrigerator Art* and *Season's Greetings*. The young writer tells us his animation training has come in handy quite often.

"John Canemaker was my professor at N.Y.U., and learning from him was fantastic," says Dougherty, who also co-penned *X2: X-Men United*. "I started out as an animator working on shows such as *Blue's Clues* and *Little Bill* in New York and did an animated pilot for MTV Animation at the time. I learned a lot about the business during those years. [Animation producer and teacher] Kit Laybourne and *Liquid Television* were huge influences."

Dougherty, who lives in Los Angeles these days, says working on the *Superman* movie has been an amazing opportunity. "My experience and knowledge of animation came into play a lot," he adds. "So much of the film is previsualized through animated storyboards. Canemaker had shown us Max Fleischer's original *Superman* cartoons back in school, and I showed those rotoscoped toons to [the film's director] Bryan Singer. They were the most fluid images of Superman. We also ended up showing the Fleischer DVD to the artists to use as reference point."

According to the writer, the film crew referred to both the original DC Comics as well as the Christopher Reeve movies to get things right. "What director Richard Donner had pioneered in the original film became our starting point. It was very important for us to stay true to the character's origin and honor his history as well


Refrigerator Art



as making it contemporary and pushing it forward. Nevertheless, there are certain archetypes that you have to keep even in a modern setting. Clark Kent has to work at The Daily Planet. Lex has to be bald. The dynamics with Lois Lane and Jimmy Olsen...all of that has to be there, but you still can't forget that you need to make the film enjoyable for a modern audience."

So why does he think the Man of Steel has such a hold on our common imagina-

tions? "Superman represents everything that's good about ourselves, regardless of how cynical we are in this day and age. He's a non-denominational religious figure and gives us something to strive for... He's uncorrectable!"

A die-hard fan of late-'70s horror movies, Spike and Mike's Festival of Animation, Cartoon Network's [adult swim] toons and MTV's *Wonder Showzen* ("I buy the shows on iTunes and email them to my friends!"), Dougherty says he also loves what Pixar and DreamWorks Animation have done in the feature arena. He adds, "I do however miss good hand-drawn animation and would love to see it come back in the future!" For now, he is happy that he can flex his own animation muscles via projects such as *Refrigerator Art*, a twisted piece featuring a stick figure family, which recently aired on G4TV. "All of these things keep me from getting bored," he jokes. "They help my attention-deficit disorder!" 

—Ramin Zahed

Stetson admits that there were some sequences that were problematic from the very beginning. He explains, "They couldn't really be resolved until you have real images, so we deviated from the pre-viz in those cases. Since eight of our vfx vendors were

animating characters or scenes from pre-viz, and each had their own pipeline and software preferences, PLF would export animation from SoftimageXSI to the desired software as required."

With the pre-viz group up and running,



Photo by David James

Stetson and the other department heads started breaking shots down to see what would be practical, digital or a combination. Stunt Coordinator R. A. Rondell, who worked with wire-flying specialists Zero-G to serve the multiple filming units, had his own ideas he wanted to bring to the film. "He wanted to take the wirework much further than I was originally thinking might be possible," Stetson admits. "So I said, 'Why don't you videotape your tests and we'll cut them into the pre-viz and see how it works?' Our pre-viz editor, Kristine Rowe, did an incredible job cutting in R. A.'s tests, which were an eye-opener to me—it really extended the possibilities of what we could get live. It also provided a pre-viz context for R. A. to show Bryan ideas while we were still developing shots."

Consequently, Stetson remembers, "We did a lot of wirework with Brandon, to let him help us develop a visual language for Superman's flying, like Christopher Reeve did so well in his movies. Brandon gave us a lot to work with. Bryan looks for realistic images, so we tried to shoot as much as possible with Brandon and used real-world camera constraints where possible to guide the shot development. That let Bryan work directly with Brandon to define the look of Superman flying and working in the film. Sometimes the photography couldn't give us the shot we needed for a particular sequence, so we would re-task that shot for a digital character."

While in theory nothing looks more real than the real actor, Stetson set out to disprove that. "I hope you say so when we're done," he grins. "Matching a digital character to our lead actor required a lot of smart and tedious work—a lot of trial and error—the talent and experience of great animators and effects artists working at their best. Rich Hoover and Andy Jones and their team at Sony Pictures Imageworks have done the heavy lifting for the hero Superman shots. It is fantastic that we can do full digital shots of Superman into close-up when we need to. Did we match him perfectly? My philosophy is a contradiction, that perfection is a relative thing. To me, perfection is finding an equation that balances time, capability and desire. So we just keep working



Warner Bros.' *Superman Returns* opens in theaters nationwide on June 30.

VISUAL EFFECTS

## Cause &amp; Effect

## Three Innovative Ways to Make Splashy Ads

by Barbara Robertson



This month, we look at the unusual processes three U.S. studios used to create their unique entries for this year's Anecy's animated commercials sidebar. One studio animated with stop-motion cut-out puppets, another put CG characters in a miniature set, and in a third, familiar objects were animated with stop-motion techniques then plussed in post.

the stop-motion photography. "In retrospect, I'd probably use a Canon with a Nikon lens now," he says. "But, we tricked the Leica so the animators could see the set through the lens, so that was a benefit."

They animated the stop-motion puppets inside a set that was around 12-feet wide; however, they built the house at the beginning and end in a smaller scale to save time. "We shot the dad, a nine-inch tall puppet, in his open doorway, and

then composited it into the smaller version of the house," Caliri says.

Designer Alex Juhasz drew the characters, an exacting process. Colors and textures, some painted by background painter Soyeon Kim, were added to Juhasz's drawings by digital guru, Todd Hemker in PhotoShop.



## Dragon Breadth

In the United Airlines commercial *Dragon*, which was brought to Duck Studios by the Fallon agency, director and cinematographer Jamie Caliri turns a child's fantasy about his father's business trip into an illustrated stop-motion animation. Dad leaves the boardroom to slay a dragon, is crowned king and flies home on the wings of a bird to deliver a small toy dragon to his son. Perhaps the father has a fantasy, too.

Caliri started with scripts from Fallon, and then storyboarded a variation of his own. "The scripts had a lot of the elements in the spot—dad takes a trip and comes home with a toy for his son," he says. "Being a dad, I could relate to that. But they had more of a montage feel—the dad goes to distant lands and different time periods."

Because the agency wanted a cutout look with stop-motion puppets, Caliri set up shop near his family in Ojai, Calif. "It would be time-consuming; I didn't want to run back and forth for dailies," he says. With his brother Dyami's help, he configured his digital Leica Digilux 2 camera for

The resulting figures were printed and cut into body parts. Morgan Hay then constructed the puppets from the body parts so that the legs, arms and other parts were moveable, and he set up the rigging.

The puppets were made of watercolor paper backed with thin plastic and held together at the joints with bent brass pins. "We discovered that 'For Sale' signs at the hardware store had the best plastic," says Caliri.

Animators led by Kim Blanchette then moved the puppets into position in 1,440 frames. "What makes stop motion different is that you can't keyframe it," says Caliri. "It's more of a high-wire act and it's exciting." Software written by Caliri's brother kept frames organized, calculated camera moves and even flipped images when necessary. The final composites were done with After Effects.

"This was a very home-brewed project," says Caliri. "We felt we should put money into people and time, not technology. Everyone got to do a little of everything."

## Fleas, Please

Portland-based Bent Image Lab also used a physical set for Hewlett-Packard's *The Flea Circus* website spot, but the fleas in the set are all CG. To build the set, the studio developed a new technique they call Preformation.

"The idea is that we do the performance in advance and pre-build the parts that conform," says Jim Clark, one of three directors who created the charming short film.

Ray Di Carlo, a second director, explains, "The overall theory is this: If you're presenting a flea circus, and if you do it in CG, all the work that goes into making it look like the real world is at the end. That last five percent takes a lot of time. Faking the real world is do-able but expensive. So, we used a real environment."

The third director, David Daniels adds, "It's like live-action. We put character effects into live ac-



tion plates. We dearly love stop motion, but we wanted motion blur."

Here's the trick: They used the same software—Cinema 4D to build most of the sets and to build and animate the characters. Starting with production drawings, they modeled the sets in 3D to scale and "printed them" using a stereo lithography machine. "It's about the size of a washing machine," says Clark. "It printed the models on 10x10x12 plastic layers, 1/1000<sup>th</sup> of a layer at time."

The art department hand painted the models and made tiny props, and then the crew filmed the fully dressed sets using a Panasonic 24p digital camera.

"Because we went back to Cinema 4D for the character animation, the props were in perfect alignment with the digital characters," says Clark. When the fleas were composited into the live-action plates, they fit.

So why didn't they simply fully render the digi-

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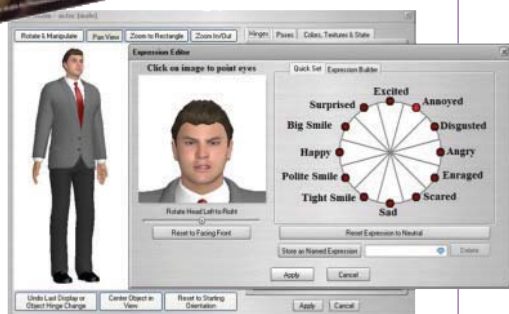


## Tech Reviews

## FrameForge3D Studio 2

Storyboarding has been around since the early days of filmmaking. In the last 15 years, with the advent of CG and 3D animation, storyboards have moved into what is now coined as *previzualization* or *previz*. Usually this is used to provide editorial with a refined shot for screening purposes while the effects are still being worked on.

Given this long history, storyboarding and previz are staples in the



filmmaking pipeline. Unfortunately, storyboarding can be intimidating for those who cannot draw. And previz can be scary for those who are clueless about 3D animation. This puts the luxury of previz square in the hands of productions with money. Luckily, there are solutions such as FrameForge, which is now on the market with its Studio 2.

FrameForge3D takes the ability to board and previz and puts it into the hands of both professional filmmakers who are looking for an inexpensive way to structure their story before going out to set with 80 people waiting for them to make a decision and the hobbyist who wants to flesh out his ideas or plan the wedding video.

This program is surprisingly deep, but the depth never comes off as intimidating. A newbie filmmaker who has never touched a camera can begin putting together scenes with relative ease and have something presentable before mom calls for dinner. There are libraries of props, set pieces, architecture, as well as characters that are impressively rigged and set up for establishing different poses and even facial expressions. You can drag and drop the pieces you need, and you can have a scene quickly.

FF3D has the ability to import Screenwriter and Final Draft files, recognize the scene headings, and use that information to set up a project containing

each of those set pieces. This is both efficient and accurate (given that the screenwriter was consistent with his names in the screenwriting phase). Once the scenes are established, sets can be built with the fairly extensive library mentioned above, or you may import additional objects from third party 3D packages like Autodesk Maya or Autodesk 3ds Max. The process is very fast as you drag and drop the objects and walls into the scene.

Shots are established with a camera: FF3D has optically correct cameras with a wide variety of lens and filmback sizes for any shoot from DV to film to HD. You can even get depth-of-field focus in the renders for those especially picky producers who don't know a rack focus from a rack of baby-back ribs. The camera is easily controllable with either interactive manipulation on the camera itself or dials and knobs on the side and bottom of the screen. You may even use a game-style controller for the camera control.

All in all, if you are planning on being a filmmaker or are one already, you know that you are going to have to plan your project one way or the other. Storyboarding and previz are the industry standards and I have no reason to refute this. The cost of the software will be earned back a million times over. In fact, there are industry posts now for FrameForge3D artists.

The final step in the process, which I'd fault FrameForge for not having to the extent that I would hope, is taking the data from all the shots that you have put together and translating that to a grocery list of all the equipment you'll need for the shoot. This would require a new library of grip, camera and lighting equipment that has not been generated. Not that you couldn't develop your own library with a little time and ambition.

Website: [www.frameforge3d.com](http://www.frameforge3d.com)

Price: \$399; upgrade: \$179

## e-on's Vue 5 Infinite

Vue Infinite, the offspring (or sibling) of the popular CG environment generator Vue d'Esprit, has been released in its newest form, bringing with it, the vast libraries of terrains, plants, trees, etc. that has made the product a common sight in professional vfx and animation studios including Industrial Light & Magic, Sony Pictures Imageworks and Cinesite. I could wax poetic about all of the nice features like the terrain generator and

by Todd  
Sheridan  
Perry



the robust renderer, but I think I should spend most of my words on xStream—the pipeline that has been developed between Vue Infinite and 3ds max and Maya.

The greatest downfall of 3D programs that sit on the periphery of the "industry standards" is that their pipeline is somewhat different than the norm. On top of that, you end up jumping back and forth between the two programs—importing, exporting, rendering, saving, loading, and what-not. Not that it's the fault of the software or the developers. In my opinion, the software *could* be made into a plug-in for the respective 3D programs, but that would restrict the programmers to the whims of the SDKs—which are, by any programmer's opinion—grossly inadequate. So we don't want to bind the hands of the people who are so willing to provide us with the tools we love.

One solution? Have generic programming language *within* the software to give the user the tools to write new code to tie the programs together. Vue utilizes the widely accepted Python language (which I'm sure has some influence from ILM). Calls can be made with MEL or MaxScripts out to Python scripts that can interact with Vue and its environments. This greatly expands the functionality and compatibility of Vue into most high-end production pipelines—a great thing for both the software and the users who depend on it. However, this is only useful for the minority of 3D users who know scripting languages ... or companies that can hire those people in that minority.

So what is the best solution? Get the programs to talk to each other seamlessly. E-on has developed XStream with this in mind. Maya and Max users are now able to open a Vue file within their own environment, or create a new Vue scene remotely. Changes can be made in one or the other of the programs, and the changes are reflected in both. Move the camera in one, the



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## Digital Magic

# Microsoft zooms in on HD; mobile games hit the road



by Chris Grove

## Clear Picture for Microsoft's High-Def Spots:

Apple might be ruling the airwaves with its cheeky Mac/PC comparison ads right now, but Microsoft is continuing its full-court press in the education market. To that end the company will soon unveil its first HD commercials as part of its global *Realizing Potential* campaign, which debuted in 2002.

Helmed by ad agency McCann-Erickson, the campaign is a collaboration between five production and post-production companies. The first spots in the campaign use 2D computer animation via a specially conformed version of the Bauhaus Mirage 2D software. The global TV, print and Internet campaign (with English language narration by William H. Macy), highlights Microsoft's education and economic development projects in 32 countries throughout Europe, Asia and America. Created by the McCann-Erickson team of creative director/copywriter Dante Lombardi and creative/art director Chris Toland, the all-HD campaign of six spots (*Ripple*, *Security*, *Startup*, *Imagine Cup*, *Parents* and *Mr. Kato*) is a cooperative effort between Z Animation (animation production); Anonymous Content (live-action production); Mad River Post (editing), A52 Post (final compositing) and Elias Arts (music).

On the strength of a test that used Mirage 2D, Z Animation was awarded the project. "We went with Mirage because it could give us that soft pencil hand-drawn look the agency wanted, and could also handle the huge animation files required for HD," says co-director Joel Parod. "We could directly import the live-action footage and animate directly on top and see it played back instantly. Many of our animators actually preferred Mirage over traditional animation, because it allowed us to import the live-action footage and draw the white line

right over the screen, while also creating mattes and composites."

## Enhanced Your Mobility Yet?

If the buzz-phrase of the late 1990s was

convergence, this year it's probably enhanced mobility. PC-maker Toshiba, for example, introduced the first HD DVD-ROM notebook computer at this year's gamer heaven Electronic Entertainment Expo. Powered by an NVIDIA GeForce Go 7600 graphics-processing unit, the Toshiba Qosmio G35-AV650 can play back high definition movies with superb picture clarity. "HD will bring a new video experience to laptop users," says Jeff Fisher, senior vice president of the GPU business at NVIDIA. "The GPU with PureVideo technology accelerates video playback with minimal CPU utilization and low power consumption, delivering a high quality video experience for PC users on the go."

**Play While You Commute:** If you find yourself increasingly annoyed by someone playing a beeping mobile game next to you on the airplane or at the coffee house, watch out. Nokia has unveiled a broad range of its next generation of mobile games. Six games in all: *Creatures of the Deep*, *ONE*, *Pocket Aces*, *Pro Series Golf*, *Space Impact* and *System Rush: Evolution*. Visitors



to the Nokia N-Gage booth at this year's E3 were among the first to experience demos of the new games for a range of Nokia Nseries multimedia computers and

other Nokia S60 devices. "Nokia is re-

defining current mobile games benchmarks by offering top-quality games on a range of devices," says Gregg Sauter, director of games publishing at Nokia. "Whether you have a few seconds to make a catch in *Creatures of the Deep* or a few minutes to fight to the top in *ONE*, we make it easy and convenient to get and play great quality games on your Nokia device."

All the new N-Gage games have been designed specifically for mobile devices, where multiplayer gaming and community gaming features via the N-Gage Arena are standard. ■

**Chris Grove is a Los Angeles-based journalist and actor. If you have hot tips for Chris, you can email him at [edit@animationmagazine.net](mailto:edit@animationmagazine.net).**

## Tech Review

continued from page 43

camera moves in the other. One drawback—in Max, at least—is that I'm not getting a graphic representation of the scene within the Max environment itself. It could be that in my limited time of working with the product, I'm just simply missing the "Show Vue Environment button." It's important to be able to see the environment you are working in, but the lack of it does not take away the benefits that you gain from xStream. I'm sure that e-on is working hard to provide this functionality—or they'll call me up and point out the button that rectifies the problem.

On top of the interactivity of merging the characters and environments—and perhaps more important—is that xStream utilizes Mental Ray in both Maya and Max. This means that the whole scene is treated as one piece in the rendering, allowing for reflections, shadows, etc. to affect the 3D object to the Vue object and visa versa. Seemingly, you gain all the benefits of Mental Ray including motion blur, global illumination, and ambient occlusion. I have not yet delved into the Final Gather functionality, but it's going to be an interesting test I think.

In a nutshell, Vue is, and has been, widely used in the industry for generating 3D photorealistic (and

non-photorealistic) environments. It can provide the base foundation for matte paintings, or, with animation functions like wind through trees, it can stand alone as whole environments to comp with live-action or other CG characters. This is well known and isn't really the focus of this review. E-on has taken the next logical step and made it so that the artist doesn't have to leave the comfort of his 3D package of choice to benefit from the tools found in Vue Infinite. And making the artist comfortable should be priority number one.

**Website:** [www.e-onsoftware.com/products/vue/](http://www.e-onsoftware.com/products/vue/)

**Price:** \$599 (boxed); \$579 (downloadable) ■

JJ Villard's  
*Son of Satan*

## MoMA's Tomorrowland Looks Back in Wonder

A Manhattan trip through the student films of CalArts offers an inspiring retrospective of work from the early days of some of today's greatest animation artists.

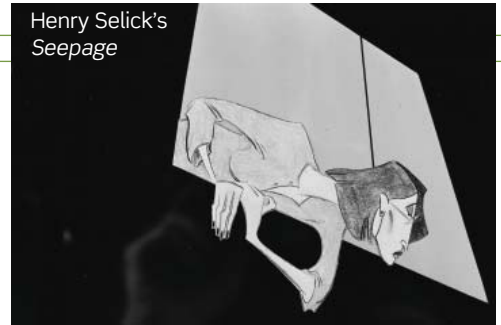
by Jake Friedman

If you find yourself in Manhattan this summer (through August 13), be sure to visit the Museum of Modern Art and its running tribute of CalArts student films, dubbed *Tomorrowland*. Only there can you see narrative and experimental student films from the past 30 years by now-famous artists and directors from Disney, Pixar, DreamWorks, *The Simpsons* and pretty much everywhere else.

The California Institute of the Arts and its famous animation school had a track record strong enough to catch the eye of MoMA Film & Media curator Josh Siegel, who previously organized animation shows of works by New York's own John Canemaker, R. O. Blechman and Tissa David. Says Siegel, "I started glancing at the resumes of various filmmakers I was interested in and noticed that what they shared was the fact that they graduated from CalArts."

Siegel took more than two years to sift through more than 1,400 student films be-

fore compiling *Tomorrowland*, a series of programs of live-action and animated films from CalArts since its founding. "I like to see the first stirrings of talent," says Siegel. "There's an energy and rawness that a lot of young filmmakers have, an ambivalence, a resourcefulness and willing-

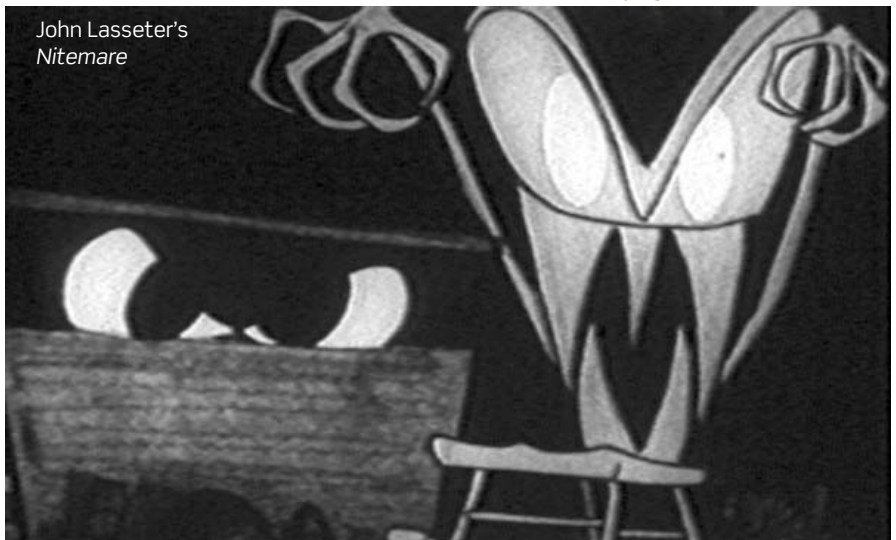
Henry Selick's  
*Seepage*

ness to try new things. One of the things that interests me about CalArts, particularly in animation, is that a lot of the techniques that they used were of their own devising. For instance, David Wilson rigged his own optical printers and developed his own hologram sculptures. Naomi Uman, used nail polish remover. Lyndon Barrois used gum wrappers."

What's perhaps most impressive about these films is the lack of time the students had in their schedule to produce them. According to Frank Terry, 10-year director of the character animation program of CalArts, "All of the student work done is short order here in the department, shoe-horned with their regular academic requirements. It's a full load for them, and subsequently, the outstanding films in my mind are the ones finished."

For their limitations, these films show an incredible variety of content and style. John Lasseter's 1979 film *Nitemare* displays a love of traditionally drawn squash-and-stretch animation. Craig McCracken's 1992 piece *Whoopass Stew!* can easily be viewed as the inspiration for *The Powerpuff Girls*. Experimental films of the 1970s by the likes of Kathy Rose, Dennis Pies and

*continued on page 46*

John Lasseter's  
*Nitemare*



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Lyndon Barrois'  
*They Were the First to Ride*



## Opportunities

*continued from page 44*

the late Adam Beckett are enchanting trips through abstract dreams, complete with astounding musical tracks that make them all the more engaging.

Siegel says that this respect for music and the other arts was widespread at CalArts, a result of the isolation of the Valencia campus. "A number of the filmmakers certainly were interested in what was going on at other parts of the school, the

music program, the dance program, the acting program. They were not exclusive in separate fiefdoms, so there are a number of collaborations. It really was a true campus and a testing ground for fresh ideas and experimentation."

One such student was Leon Joosen, who started at CalArts in 1980 before animating for Disney and most recently directing the animation for the two *Scooby-Doo* movies. He remembers an overbearing traditional ideal within the animation department headed by Disney's own Jack Hannah. "The best thing about that program was the fact that it was so conservative and stodgy," says Joosen. "You'd think that would be stifling, but every time you stamp down conservatively in one area, it has to burst out somewhere else. We had to have our storyboards approved by our instructors, so you had to do a fake storyboard and then go do what you

wanted to do. The fact that you had to be creative behind their backs made it that much more creative. So you get people like Gary Conrad [director of *The Fairly OddParents*] doing a film like *Friday the 13th* but making it about Santa Claus and calling it *December the 24th*."

Joosen, Conrad and future *Lilo and Stitch* director Chris Sanders collaborated at CalArts to produce the highly praised *Toby* in 1984. It's a film about a badly drawn boy and several other different types of iconic cartoon characters, "in an institute that represents CalArts," says Joosen. "It was an outlandish school with a conservative group of traditional animators within it. *Toby* is character animation put in a school of the animation obscure. He tries to fit in, but he thinks he's too good for everybody. The film resonates with CalArts crowds because it so closely represents everything we go through at that school." ■

**Jake Friedman is a New York-based animator. You can visit him at [www.jakefriedman.net](http://www.jakefriedman.net).**

**For more info about the *Tomorrowland* exhibit visit <http://fv.calarts.edu/main/moma.html>**

## Cause & Effect

*continued from page 46*

tal sets? "The textures and lighting of the physical set have a quality that allowed us to do handheld camera work," says Di Carlo. "And, the amount of render time it would have taken to get the same surface quality would have been ridiculous. Faking the real world is do-able, but expensive. This way is cost-effective. And, it's real."

## If You Have a Lemon . . .

A stop-motion film titled *Kaboom!*, by the artist named PES, inspired the davidandgoliath ad agency to ask PES to create something similar for a series of Bacardi commercials. "I pitched a couple ideas, but they didn't like them at all," he says. "So, I said, 'Well, what are you going to do? Make a submarine or a rocket out of a bottle?' It was the most trite idea anyone could come up with. And they said, 'Let's do that.'"

They commissioned him to do the project—four spots, one, called *Limon*, rocketed to Anecy. For these spots, the client asked him to create a world surrounding the vehicular bottles only from bar-related items. For *Limon*, the sub-

marine bottle travels over an ocean bed populated with toothpick sea urchins, past a school of martini-glass fish and ice tong sea serpents, to arrive at a city constructed

from ice cube trays and cocktail shakers.

The submarine bottle, pulled through the set with a rig that was later removed, emerges from a giant lemon at the beginning of the spot. "We needed a big garage, and I tossed out the idea of a big lemon as a joke," PES says. "Next thing I knew, we were putting the 50<sup>th</sup> coat of paint on a four-foot-wide lemon."

In addition to animating all the characters frame by frame, PES also had the cinematographer animate the light. "We cycled the light through a filter," he says. "It turned one notch every frame. It's not perfect, but the light on the floor undulates and makes it feel like the ocean, and the effect was created in camera."



The bubbles, however, were added in post at RIOT, which also handled rig removal and compositing.

"What's interesting is that the agency and Bacardi really wanted to be able to say they created the spot by

hand," PES says. "But in the end, after all the compositing, they really slicked it up so much that it doesn't necessarily feel like stop motion. But, they certainly made it beautiful."

Although each of these studios created these commercials using different techniques, they are united by a feeling that each was handcrafted; the impression all these spots create is that an artist touched the work. ■

**Barbara Robertson is an award-winning journalist who specializes in vfx and digital animation. If you have any tips on cool vfx-related stories for Barbara, you can e-mail her at [brobertson@animationmagazine.net](mailto:brobertson@animationmagazine.net).**



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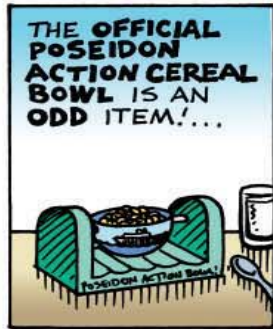
\*NURBS: acronym for 'non-uniform, rational B-spline', frequently used in 3D Animation at VFS to generate and illustrate curved surfaces in a digital environment.



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BY MIKE FISHER



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John Knoll | BA University of Southern California | Visual Effects Supervisor, Industrial Light & Magic, San Francisco, California | Co-creator Photoshop | 20-year SIGGRAPH attendee

Tobi Saulnier | PhD Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute | CEO, 1st Playable Productions, Troy, New York | 3-year SIGGRAPH attendee

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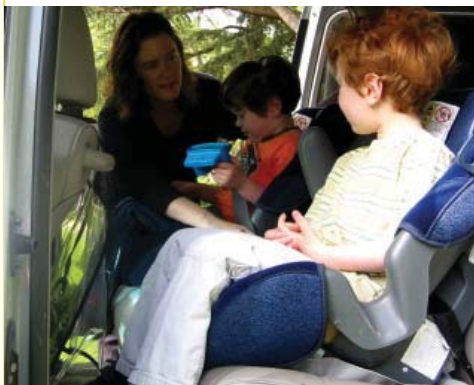
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**A DAY IN THE LIFE**

Sometimes a sneeze produces something really cool. In fact, there's always something awesome coming out of Hollywood-based commercial production house **ka-chew!**. The studio, which actually derives its nomenclature from parent company Klasky Csupo, takes us behind the scenes as it produces another brain-tingling animated spot.



Executive producer of animated commercials Liz Seidman loads the twins into the car 'early in the morning' prior to starting her day at the ka-chew! offices in Hollywood



**"Double Duty"**

Executive producer of animated commercials Liz Seidman starts her day by liberating two small children from a nearby sweatshop. Either that or she's walking her twins to school.



**"2D meets CG"**

Bryan Blevins, head of CGI (seated), acts out a scene from *Scarface* as director Paul Demeyer and Seidman try to confer over the latest mix media spot.



**"Jamming gets the creative juices flowing"**

(L to R) Creative director of animation and design John Andrew and exec VP Richard Marlis tackle some of Bread's greatest hits as they plan their next move.



**"Multi-Tasking Multi-Mix Media"**

Exec VP Richard Marlis talks, negotiates and wishes he had a third hand to scratch his nose.



**"Finalist in the authentic blue jean contest!"**

Senior producer Nathalie Renard and Seidman model the latest in casual Friday fashion when they receive word that they've been awarded another new campaign.



**"How Much 'Dough?'"**

Keebler character "Ernie" turns white and senior producer Nathalie Renard and Seidman have to hold him up after explaining how much bread it can take to produce an animated commercial!



Liz Seidman poses with her other twins, Mr. Mucus and his commercial stunt double. Talk about a two-hanky production!



**"Didn't even have time to shave"**

Sam Schoemann, executive producer of broadcast design, starts his very busy day with a g o'clock shadow and little patience for photographers.



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I, \_\_\_\_\_, (\_\_\_\_\_) \_\_\_\_\_  
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